

ANC

MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

APRIL
35 CENTS

A PETER CHAMBERS
NOVELETTE BY

**Henry
Kane**

**EVERY
STORY
NEW!**

See "Everybody's Watching Me"

By MICKEY SPILLANE, page 111



ONE STEP AHEAD

We've been trying desperately to keep up with the newsstand demand for *Manhunt*, but—we're happy to say—*Manhunt* readers have always been one step ahead of us.

We printed 600,000 copies of our first issue, and we boosted the printing to 800,000 for our second issue, but there remained a great many newsdealers who ran out and who were forced to disappoint their customers.

We don't want this to happen to you.

We've decided, therefore, to extend our original subscription offer to make certain you'll get each and every issue of *Manhunt* as soon as it leaves the presses. Just fill in the coupon on page 38, send it together with your check or money order for \$4.00, and the next twelve jam-packed issues will come direct to your door.

Mail your
subscriptions to:
MANHUNT
545 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York

VOL. 1, NO. 4

MANHUNT

APRIL, 1953

CONTENTS

SERIAL

- EVERYBODY'S WATCHING ME — Part IV
By Mickey Spillane.....Page 120

NOVELETTES

- ONE LITTLE BULLET *by Henry Kane*.....Page 1
A Peter Chambers story
- THE BLUE SWEETHEART *by David Goodis*.....Page 102
- THE G-NOTES *by Robert Patrick Wilmot*.....Page 65

SHORT STORIES

- FAN CLUB *by Richard Ellington*.....Page 48
A Steve Drake story
- MUGGER MURDER *by Richard Deming*.....Page 85
- KID KILL *by Evan Hunter*.....Page 93
- BE MY GUEST *by Robert Turner*.....Page 39
- BIG TALK *by Kris Neville*.....Page 31
- SHAKEDOWN *by Roy Carroll*.....Page 57

SPECIAL FEATURE

- CRIME AND PUNISHMENT? *by Shepherd Koler*...Page 100

Editor—JOHN McCLOUD
Art Director—CHAS. W. ADAMS

Managing Editor — E. A. TULMAN
Business Manager — R. E. DECKER

MANHUNT • Volume 1, Number 4, April, 1953. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of St. John Publishing Company), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York. Telephone MU 7-6623. Application for second class entry is pending at the Post Office, New York, New York. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1953 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of St. John Publishing Company), under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.



*One minute a man can
be sitting and drinking —
the next, he can be dead.
All it can take is*

One Little Bullet

A NOVELETTE

BY HENRY KANE

NEW YORK is lousy with night clubs. There are strip joints, clip joints, jive joints, live joints, square joints, hip joints, crash joints, splash joints, crumb joints, class joints.

The Long-Malamed is class. All the way.

It is located on Fifty-fifth Street at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue. It is a narrow, two-story, rust-red building with a shimmering, scarlet, patent leather canopy, and a shimmering, scarlet-adorned door-man. Three steps up are heavy translucent glass doors and, when you push through, you're in the small ante room which is the cocktail lounge of the Long-Malamed.

Separating the cocktail lounge and the night club room are two winding white marble stairways, each — I had been informed by Tobias Eldridge, the amiable genius behind the bar — leading upstairs to the well-furnished town apartment of Joe Malamed, one of the owners of the club.

I had never met Mr. Joe Malamed. He had recently moved up to the big time, coming from Miami and forming a partnership with a young man of many dollars, one Melvin Long. Joe Malamed had a wife, and I had heard, too, that she took an active interest in the operation of the club.

I was seated at a hinge in the bar, near to the door and opposite the check-room, working on a tall scotch

and water, and watching Miss Irene Whitney.

Nothing had been stacked like Miss Irene Whitney since the Pyramids. Miss Whitney was tall and perfect. Miss Whitney has a shock of tousled short-cut iridescent auburn hair that was practically indecent, a lovely nose, and dark blue eyes. Miss Whitney also had legs.

At the hazard of a guess. I would suggest that Miss Whitney had been hired by the Long-Malamed on the strength of her legs. That, anyway, is what her uniform declared. She wore spike-heeled black shoes, black opera-length nylons, a tiny flounced skirt (that was one flounce and no skirt), a black silk sash, a white silk blouse and a short sequined monkey jacket. Miss Whitney was a serious student of the drama, attending a dramatic school in the daytime and acquiring the wherewithal to do same by checking coats in night-clubs at night, and offering cigarettes and fuzzy little pandas for sale. Miss Whitney was a floor show on her own.

The floor show moved to me at the bar.

"Hi," I said. "How's Yale?"

"Yale." Disparagement made wrinkles on her nose, adding to its effectiveness.

Yale was a young man who attended Yale University, a school of learning. Weekends he came into town for the avowed purpose of giving a rapid rush to Miss Irene Whitney. My name is Peter Chambers,

and I am neither as young, handsome, unsubtle or rich as Yale, but I was in there pitching too. This was Miss Whitney's second night in the employ of the Long-Malamed, and I'd been there both nights.

"Drink?" I said.

"Not with the boss sitting at the other end of the bar," Irene said.

Two men were seated at the far end. The one nearer to the archway was pale, slender and immaculately attired. He handled his drink with delicate fingers. He had straight white hair, parted in the middle, and neatly combed. He looked on the good side of sixty. The other was perhaps fifteen years his junior, a small man, a rugged little man with a ruddy sun-creased neck and a face as pink as the shrimp-fed flamingos at Hialeah. They seemed in the midst of a gentlemanly argument, the slender man's voice quiet and modulated, the small man's intense and rasping.

"Which one?" I said to Tobias.

"The one with the white hair. He's Joe Malamed."

"Who's the other one?"

"Remember Frankie Hines? Used to be a top jockey. Top jockey in the whole country. Don't tell me you don't remember Frankie Hines?"

Sure I remembered Frankie Hines. "That," I said, "was a long time ago. I thought he was dead, or something."

"Ain't dead nohow. Retired. Got a million enterprises. Got more loot than King Midas. Who the hell, Mr.

Chambers, was this King Midas, anyway?"

I sipped and I smiled at Tobias Eldridge. Tobias was an old friend who had worked many of the top bars in our city of New York, as had I, except I was generally on the other side of the stick from Tobias. He was tall and thin with a shock of black hair falling over his forehead. He had a long inquisitive nose, a young face, and the knowing, old, ageless eyes that are the special prerequisite of bartenders born to be bartenders.

"King Midas?" I said. "A myth. Everything he touched turned to gold."

"That's Frankie," said Tobias. "Frankie Hines is loaded."

"Loaded," Irene said, "reminds me of the customers in the back room. They should be in the mood now for the cute little pandas, purveyed by yours truly, don't you think?"

"I think," I said.

Irene went to her check-room and I watched, appreciatively, as her hands went up over her head, attaching the strap about her neck. She came out bearing the tray of cigarettes and the pandas, winked at me, and proceeded with undulant grace through the archway and into the darkened room.

"You going in to see the show, Mr. Chambers?" Tobias asked. "It's going on any minute."

I was about to answer when Joe Malamed rapped on the bar for Tobias' attention. Tobias moved off, stumping the wooden bridge behind

the bar, and refilled Malamed's glass.

The argument stepped up a notch, audible to me.

"Look," Joe Malamed said to Hines, "I owe you the dough and I admit it. But you're making a pest of yourself. Quit hounding me, and you'll get-paid faster."

Frankie Hines said, "If I quit hounding you, I'll never get paid. And I'm sick and tired of waiting." He opened his knees and got off his stool. "If you want me to put the squeeze on, Joe, I got friends what can squeeze."

Malamed smiled up at Tobias. "Now he's threatening me."

"I beg your pardon," said Tobias, blandly.

"Nothing," Malamed said. "Forget it. And you forget it too, Frankie boy. You'll be paid inside a week. Now go in and enjoy the show."

"Can I sit at your wife's table?"

"Be my guest," Malamed said. "She's sitting with our book critic friend, Charles Morse, and a few other people. You know Charley?"

Frankie Hines had already disappeared into the darkness through the archway. Tobias returned to me.

"What's the hassle?" I said.

"Search me. When it's the boss who's in an argument, the bartender wears earlaps. You know how it is, Mr. Chambers."

The M.C.'s voice came through from the darkened room.

" . . . and now, ladies and gentlemen, Calvin Cole . . . the great Cal-

vin Cole . . . the one and only . . . in an Afro-Cuban fantasy on the drums . . . assisted by Manaja . . . the dancing dervish." Now he made his joke. "*Hold on to your pockets, ladies and gentlemen. Darkness will descend upon the room. Total darkness.*" His voice rose to a high pitch. "*Calvin Cole . . . and Manaja.*"

All the lights went out. A tiny spot played on the glistening features of Calvin Cole as he rapped out his rhythms against the skin-tight drums he held between his knees.

"You going to watch?" Tobias said.

"What have I got to lose?"

I found a place just inside the archway, leaning against the wall, holding my drink. Now, lightning from the spot hit the stage in garish waves as Manaja began her torso-flinging performance. Her copper body had been rubbed with oil, reflecting the bursting flashes of light . . . light and darkness . . . light and darkness. I watched for some five minutes and then I went back into the gloom of the cocktail lounge. Tobias Eldridge was in the check-room, feet up like a banker, smoking.

"What's with you?" I asked. "You quit?"

"Resting," he said. Nobody at the bar except Mr. Malamed. Everybody watching Calvin and that Manaja. Wow, that Manaja! I got a needle for that Manaja."

I extended my glass. "Let's freshen this up, huh?"

Tobias sighed, ground out the

cigarette in a sea-shell ashtray and stood up. "Okay. I'm ready." He stretched languidly. "That Manajal!" He walked behind the bar.

"I'll take Whitney."

He grinned. "So would I. If I could."

Mr. Joe Malamed had his arms crossed on the bar. His head nestled in his arms.

Tobias reached behind him for a bottle, and I moved to Mr. Malamed.

"I'm buying," I said, "as long as it's so lonely out here."

Mr. Malamed made no answer.

I touched him. His head moved.

Blood made a bright red trickle on the white bar.

Tobias Eldridge gulped a brandy but it did nothing for the pallor of his face.

"This guy's dead," I said.

The lights went on in the inner room. Ruth Benson, the chanteuse, came on, singing her naughty songs.

"Dead?" Tobias said. "You sure?"

"One little bullet. Clean through the temple. I'm sure."

"One little bullet," Tobias said in wonderment. "One lousy little bullet." His voice reached up to falsetto. "Why, the guy was just sitting here, just sitting here with a drink . . ."

The first one out was Irene Whitney.

She saw what I held in my hands, and screamed. Piercingly.

Ruth Benson's song stopped. People poured out of the inner room. Screams topped screams. The men

made a rush for the check-room, grabbing at coats. The cocktail lounge swarmed with hysteria.

I dropped Malamed back on the bar and fought through to the thick glass doors. I shot the bolt, locking the doors, and then I turned and spread my arms out wide like a young cop trying to hold up the pandemonium of onrushing traffic.

"All right," I yelled. "Everybody. Quiet. *Quiet.*"

A young man in a tuxedo, dragging his coat, rushed me, trying to get out. I wound up a fist and caught him as he came. He went down clean. It helped. The noise simmered down to bubbling sounds.

"Quiet," I yelled. "Shut up, everybody."

Suddenly there was absolute silence. The women stared at me, goggle-eyed. The men stared at me exactly like the women.

"All right," I said. "A guy's been murdered. Nobody leaves till the cops come. That clear?"

There was no argument.

"Fine," I said. "Now all you guys start putting your coats back into the check-room. And somebody get this drunk in front of me off the floor."

Somebody did. Some of the men moved to the check-room and hung their coats back.

I said: "All right. Now all of you go back to your tables. All of you go back where you were."

The crowd began to thin out. I said: "Any music in the house?"

A woman's voice came back at me. "Yes."

"Well, get them playing, will you?"

The woman's voice called, "Stan, get the boys together. Start them playing."

"Right, Mrs. Malamed. Right you are. Okay, boys. Let's go. On the double."

Soon there was music, soft strain.

"Okay," I said. "Everybody back in place. Nobody comes in, nobody goes out. Till we get the cops."

A young man, a guy with broad shoulders and black hair, shouldered through to me. "Thanks," he said. "Thanks a lot."

"Who are you?"

"Melvin Long, Joe Malamed's partner."

"Well, get them back to their tables, Melvin. Get them all back to where they were."

"You're Chambers, aren't you? Peter Chambers?"

"How do you know?"

"Seen you around."

"Okay. Now get them back, huh? Get them all back."

Soon enough the coats were back in the check-room and the customers were back in their chairs. Nobody remained in the cocktail lounge except Malamed, head-down on the bar near the archway, Tobias rigid near the brandy bottle behind the bar, Irene Whitney near the check-room, and Melvin Long nervously rubbing his hands directly in front of me.

"You too," I said. "You and Miss Whitney. Back there exactly where you were."

Long said, "He's right, Irene. Come on. You were out on the floor."

He led her through the archway and now I was alone with Tobias. I left my station at the glass doors and went to the bar. I said, "One for you, one for me, and then you call the cops."

I had scotch neat.

He had brandy.

Then he reached down, brought up the phone, stuck a trembling forefinger in the slot marked O, and whirled the dial.

II

Fifteen minutes later, Detective Lieutenant Parker and his gang of experts from Headquarters held class in the Long-Malamed. Parker, out of Homicide, was a straight cop with no curves. He was squat and solid and built like a beer barrel. He had a square jowl, crew-cut black hair, strong white teeth and black eyes. Parker had a respect for his fellow men, excepting criminals, and including private eyes. Detective Lieutenant Louis Parker, Homicide, New York City, was an old and valued friend. Under his capable supervision a good deal of work was accomplished in a comparatively short period of time.

Louis Parker summed it up: "The guy was killed from a bullet shot from the inside room. What with the drum raps and the light flashes,

the pistol shot went unnoticed. He was killed by a thirty-eight. He was a sitting duck, a perfect target, out in the light of the cocktail lounge, near enough to the archway. Nobody saw anybody with a gun, they were all watching that oiled-up Manaja. Pretty gorgeous, that Manaja. And everybody's accounted for. I mean, everybody was seated at his respective table, nobody went to the john or nothing. This eliminates quite a group."

"Why?" I said.

"Because I've got experts, and they've got instruments that measure. Now, from the trajectory of the bullet and the angle of entrance into the temple, considered in conjunction with the particular shape of the room —"

"Trajectory," I said, my eyebrows up in admiration. "Real fancy."

"Means the curve described by a body moving through space — the body, in this case, being a bullet discharged from a thirty-eight. Anyway, it eliminates a goodly group, and places in jeopardy only those within the segment from whence the shot could have been fired."

"Whence," I said. "Brother, what are our cops coming to?"

"The room seats two hundred and eight. And it was filled to capacity. But within our circle of jeopardy — only two tables: that of Mrs. Joe Malamed, and a table seating a party of six, visitors in from San Francisco, with not the remotest acquaintance with Joe Malamed."

"That narrows it down plenty, doesn't it?"

"And how it does." Parker turned to one of his uniformed minions. "Okay, let them go now. They get their coats out of the check-room and blow. Take the names, occupations, addresses. Have them show identification." He consulted a card. "The ones that stay are Claire Malamed, Melvin Long, Charles Morse, Frank Hines, and Ruth Benson."

"Why do they stay?" I asked.

"Because they were the ones seated at Mrs. Malamed's table during Calvin Cole's performance." He called to the cop again. "It's okay for Morse, Hines and Long to get their hats and coats. That whole crew's going downtown with us."

They lined up at the check-room like an impatient queue at the box office of a hit show. The men obtained their hats and coats, took the arms of their girl friends, and hurried the hell out through the heavy glass doors.

I found a spot near Parker at the bar and I said, "Is it all right if I have a drink?"

"Sure. And I want to thank you for the way you handled this, Pete. Nice job, locking the doors and keeping them here."

"Scotch," I said to Tobias. To Parker: "How does it look?"

"Stinks," he said.

"But why?"

"First, no gun. No weapon. Nothing in sight, and this is a big joint. Second, these." He brought up a

pair of old leather gloves. "Found them right by the archway. Dropped during the excitement after Whitney screamed. They don't belong here, do they? Don't belong in a snooty night club, a pair of broken-down, grimy, ordinary leather gloves."

"No, they don't."

"Whoever did this job, planned it," "You shoot off a gun, you get nitrate impregnations in your palm. You wear leather gloves, the impregnations remain in the gloves. These pair fit a man or a woman. Where does that leave me?"

"You can trace gloves, can't you?"

"You ought to know better than that, Pete. With you I don't have to make like a sherlock. These are an ordinary pair of leather gloves purchased, maybe, easy, six months ago. Thousands of stores sell them to hundreds of thousands of customers right across the counter. We'll make the routine try, of course, but it don't figure."

"You're so right, Lieutenant."

"Now we're taking that bunch from Mrs. Malamed's table downtown for a fast paraffin test for disclosure of nitrates in the palm. We'll find nothing." He tapped the gloves. "We'll find it all here."

"What about prints? On the gloves?"

"Whoever was smart enough to figure the gloves was smart enough not to get prints on the gloves."

"Stinks," I said, "is right."

I drank part of my drink and turned toward the check-room. Most

of the clients of the Long-Malamed had already vacated. Frankie Hines got his coat and hat and tipped Irene a dollar.

"Well, thank you," Irene said.

Hines and Melvin Long, wearing their coats, joined us at the bar and ordered drinks from Tobias. The next in line at Irene's check-room was a tall, distinguished man of about thirty-five, with grey temples, curly dark hair, light blue eyes and a thin mustache.

"Charles Morse," the man said to the cop with the notebook. "Book critic." He showed identification, then he handed his check to Irene. She helped him with the coat, accepted his tip.

"What's the address?" the cop said.

"Fifteen East Nineteenth."

"Thanks," the cop said. "You stay."

"Yes. I know."

Morse moved toward us at the bar, shoving his hands deep into the pockets of his dark blue coat.

Suddenly, he froze.

A grimace grew on his mouth.

"What's the matter?" Parker called.

Morse's right hand came out of his coat pocket. It held a gun. A nickel-plated, pearl-handled revolver that looked like a thirty-eight. I heard a gasp. I turned. Melvin Long's face had gone whiter than a napkin at the Waldorf.

Parker and Frank Hines rushed at Morse. Parker used a handkerchief

and took the revolver out of Morse's hand.

"This yours?" Parker said.

"No. Of course not."

"What's it doing in your pocket?"

"I wish I knew."

Parker squinted down at the gun and an unhappy smile widened his mouth. "This looks like it." He wrapped it in the handkerchief and handed it to a cop. "You sure?" he said to Morse.

"Sure I'm sure. Look, Lieutenant, I wouldn't kill a man, then put the gun in my own coat pocket, then come up with it and display it to you. Now, would I?"

"No. You wouldn't." Parker said. "Figures during that excitement around the checkroom, everybody grabbing for coats, somebody shoved that gun into the first available coat pocket. That's the way it figures." He sighed, and his voice came up. "All right. Everybody on my list, let's go."

Fingers squeezed my arm. Melvin Long said, "I want to talk to you."

"Now?"

"As soon as I can."

"Now you're heading for downtown."

"I know. But as soon as possible after that. Where?"

"You know Schmattola's?"

"Yes."

"I'm always there after curfew."

"After curfew? I said as soon as possible."

"By the time they get through with you, it'll be after curfew."

"All right, Mr. Chambers. Wait for me. Please."

"Check," I said.

Parker called: "Let's go, everybody. Come on. Come on."

III

Ernie Schmattola's Pizza Parlor was located on Forty-ninth Street off Sixth Avenue. Ernie had figured out a deal and it had paid off. Ernie had been born in Naples but he was more New York than New York. He knew the town, he breathed the town, he loved the town, he lived the town. Where most restaurants opened at about eleven in the morning and closed at about eleven at night, Ernie opened at eleven at night and closed at eleven the next morning. There are a good many late birds in New York who get hungry at the most inappropriate hours, and these are the birds that Ernie served. Schmattola's was always crowded, giving a view of a cross-section of the populace, from the parasites of low syndicate to the paragons of high society.

Schmattola's was a mass of many rooms, with scurrying waiters and the thrum of constant and overlapping conversation. The cooks in the kitchen were the best in the land, as were the prohibitive prices which prohibited, it seems, nobody. Ernie himself was a squat man, the shape of a butter tub and with the strut of a penguin. He was swarthy with dark, beady, humorous eyes, and he was the soul of compassion.

To his friends he served, on call, compassionate after-hour drinks in reminiscent tea-cups. I was a friend.

He met me at the door and I said, "I want privacy, Ernie. I want privacy, a double scotch, water, white bread and ravioli."

"It's my pleasure, Mr. Chambers."

"I'm expecting a friend. He'll ask for me."

"It's my pleasure, Mr. Chambers."

He took me to a nook away from the crowd. I sipped my scotch, sniffed my ravioli, and dug in. I began to think about the Long-Malamed. Of the people at the table of jeopardy, as Parker had so quaintly put it, I had seen Frankie Hines (of whom I knew by past bright reputation), I had seen Charles Morse (of whom I knew by present unblemished reputation), and I had spoken with Melvin Long. I had not even seen Mrs. Claire Malamed, or if I had, I didn't know who she was. Ruth Benson I had observed singing from afar at various clubs about the town. So much for the cast of characters.

I had finished the ravioli and was mopping up the plate with the wonderful white bread when Ernie ushered Melvin Long to my table.

I said, "Something?"

"Can I get a drink?"

"It might be arranged."

"I need one. Gin and tonic."

"That's too fancy for here. You can have gin, in a tea-cup."

"Gin. In a tea-cup."

I nodded at Ernie.

"How was it downtown?" I asked.

"Pretty lousy."

"They find anything?"

"They found nothing. All of us responded negative to the test. We were all sent home."

"I see. Now what's with the urgent conversation with me?"

He squirmed around in his seat like he was sitting at a concert and didn't like music. Then he blurted, "That was my gun."

"What?"

"The gun that Charles Morse produced, it was my gun, I'd swear it."

"Your gun?"

"A shining, nickel-plated, thirty-eight calibre revolver, with a pearl-type handle. There aren't too many around like that."

"Look, pal. Did you kill Joe Malamed?"

"No."

We sat in silence and stared across at one another. He seemed a nice enough guy, about twenty-eight, with glistening black well-combed hair, scared brown eyes, dark cheeks closely shaven to a blue sheen, and long white fidgety fingers with buffed nails.

I said, "Why do you think it's your gun?"

"Because I had one exactly like that. It disappeared."

"Got a license for the gun?"

"Yes."

"How'd it disappear?"

"I don't know. It was in my apartment. Then it wasn't."

"Any idea who hooked it?"

"Any one of perhaps five hundred people."

"Do that a little slow for me, will you, pal?"

"I have a penthouse suite on Central Park South. Two days ago, I had a cocktail party, and it was open house. People came and people went. You know how it is."

"Yeah," I said.

"Here's the truth, Mr. Chambers. When it comes to guns — any kind of firearms — I'm a bust. I have a phobia about guns. I may have fired a gun at targets maybe three times in all my life, and each time I was scared to death."

"Then how come you own one?"

"I got it as a gift. I . . . I sort of liked it, made me feel good, that sort of thing. I got a license for it, and kept it around the apartment — for protection, sort of, though I don't think that's the real reason."

"What would the real reason be?"

"I don't know. Made me a big man with a gun. Blew up my ego in some cockeyed kind of way." His smile was wan.

"All right, then, Melvin —"

"My friends call me Mel."

"Okay, Mel. Just what do you want me to do for you?"

"I want to retain you — right now — to discover who murdered Joe Malamed."

"Don't you think the cops can do it?"

"That's just what I'm afraid of. I'll wind up as their pigeon. Guns can be traced, can't they?"

"I take it you didn't mention any of this to Lieutenant Parker."

"No. I didn't mention it. Will you handle it, Mr. Chambers?"

"Did you kill him, Mel?" I asked again.

"No, I didn't."

"Okay. I'll handle it. But I'll tell you right now, if it develops that you're it, I turn you in, pal, *and* I keep the fee." I tried a smile. "It's what you call ethics."

He took out a folding check book and a small ball-point pen and he scribbled and he scraped the check from the pad and handed it over. It was for one thousand dollars. I like rich clients.

"Fine," I said and folded the check and put it away. "One question. About you and Joe Malamed."

His face puckered. "Yes?"

"How'd you get along, you and Joe — say, as of yesterday?"

He looked for more gin in the tea-cup. There was no more gin in the tea-cup. "I'd rather not discuss that."

"Suit yourself. You're the client."

What the hell — it would be easy to find out.

"Where'll I be able to reach you, Mr. Chambers? I mean —"

"I've got an office, but I'm almost never there. I'm up nights and sleep days, mostly. Here. Here at Schmat-tola's. From curfew till the sun starts coming up, you figure to find me here."

"Swell."

He stood up and rubbed his hands. "Okay if I leave now?"

"Not at all. Leaving myself. Hang on till I pay the check, and I'll ride up a way with you."

IV

The next day I made the bank by a whisker and deposited his check. It was a day of high wind and everybody looked healthy. I fought the wind to a theatrical-type store and made a purchase that put a dent in my new fee. I fought the wind again to the Long-Malamed. I didn't take a cab. You've got to do something for your lungs occasionally.

There's nothing more dreary than a night club before it opens, except a graveyard in a fog. The Long-Malamed smelled of yesterday's cigarette smoke and today's disinfectant. One bright light cast long and frightening shadows. Tobias was behind the bar vigorously putting sparkle to the cocktail glasses.

"Hello, Mr. Chambers," he said. "You're a little previous. We ain't serving yet."

"You're serving him, aren't you?" I pointed to the back of a man at the end of the bar.

"He's special."

"Is he?"

The man turned around. It was Louis Parker.

"Special enough, Tobias. My apologies." I placed my flat package down on the bar and went to Parker. I said, "How goes it, Lieutenant?"

"Not too good. What brings you pub-crawling this early?"

"Same brings you, I imagine."

"You mean you cajoled a client out of this mess?"

"That's the truth, Lieutenant."

"Who?"

"Confidential, but I've got a hunch you'll know sooner than you think."

"We're not going to cross wires, are we, Pete?"

"With other guys in the Department — maybe. But not with you, Louis."

"Thanks."

"How goes it?"

"Stinks."

"The gloves?"

"Just the way I figured. Absolutely nothing."

"The gun?"

"Only prints are Charles Morse's, which is as it should be, since he handled it taking it out of his pocket. The rest were smudges."

"Pretty smart."

"Smarter than you think. I had one angle. I figured that would do it for me."

"What was that, Lieutenant?"

"All our suspects furnished us with specimens of their prints. Voluntarily, of course, but on request."

"But if the gun had no useful prints, and the gloves had nothing — what'd you need the specimens for?"

"My angle. Any guesses about my angle?"

"Nope. I'm dull this afternoon."

"There's stuff people forget, when they're not too smart."

"Such as?"

"Such as you leave no prints when

you wear gloves and no nitrate particles hit your palm — but what people frequently forget is that prints can be left *inside* the gloves. Check?"

"You're a cutie, Lieutenant."

"Well, whoever pulled this was cuter. They made sure to rub the fingerprints off the gloves, so nothing showed." He shrugged. "Smart operator, Petie. Real smart. It'll be a pleasure to nab him. Or her."

"Trace the gun yet?"

"We're working on that."

"Good luck."

"Thanks." He got off the stool, went to the door, said, "Keep in touch," and left.

"Nice man," said Tobias.

"The best. How's about an eyepener?"

"Only for you, Mr. Chambers. On the house." He poured.

I raised the glass. "First today."

The doors swung and Irene Whitney entered, pert in a neat blue suit and rosy with the wind.

"First today," I said at Irene Whitney.

She made a prim face. "Anybody who drinks before nightfall is a drunk."

"That's me," I said, and knocked it down. It burned and I shuddered. "Got a present for you."

"For me?" said Tobias.

"For her," I said.

"Naturally," said Tobias.

Irene hovered while I unwrapped the package. Her perfume was lovely. "Oh," she said with enough enthusiasm to equal the purchase price.

"Opera-length nylons! Long, wonderful lace nylons." She looked at me with real affection, kissed my cheek. "You're a thoughtful kind of guy." She kissed me again.

"You'll leave marks on his face," Tobias said.

"Let me worry," I said, "about marks on my face."

Irene leaned toward Tobias. "How's she taking it?" she said softly. "Mrs. Malamed."

"Like a trooper." He inclined his head toward the inner room. "She's inside, setting things up for tonight."

"If she asks for me, I'm upstairs, getting into my uniform." Her wonderful teeth shone in a smile. "Uniform, I call it." She took up the package. "Thanks, Peter."

"Date for tonight? You've got your bribe."

"It's no bribe and you know it. Boy, how these men try to talk tough! Pick me up at closing?"

"You bet."

"Date for tonight." She went to the stairway, called back to Tobias: "Ruth here yet?"

"Upstairs."

She ran up the stairs. I watched her legs. Then I turned back to Tobias. "How's it set up, up there?"

"Joe Malamed's room in the rear, Claire Malamed's room in the front, a couple of toilets, and one room, in the middle, for acts to dress in."

"I get it. Now about this Frankie Hines."

"You mean that big typhoon?"

"Typhoon?"

"Retired rich guy?"

"Tycoon."

"Yeah, tycoon."

"I'm going to want to talk with him. Where do I find him? You know?"

"This time of day, you figure to reach him at the coffee pot."

"The what?"

"Coffee pot."

"What coffee pot, Tobias?"

"One of the enterprises of the typhoon is a little coffee pot over on Fifty-second by Seventh. It's called The Horseshoe. It's easy to find. It's the one with no customers. I think that Frankie just keeps it to have a little hangout for himself, maybe a hot meal sometimes when he's hungry."

He looked over my shoulder, and went back to polishing glasses. A young woman came up to us. She said, "I'm sorry, but we're not serving yet." She looked at the shot glass near me, and then she looked at Tobias. Tobias said, "He's a cop."

"Cop?"

"Private," I said.

Tobias said, "Mr. Chambers, Peter Chambers — Mrs. Claire Malamed."

"Well . . ." I said. "Well . . ."

"May I ask why you're staring, Mr. Chambers?"

"Well . . ." I said. "Uh . . . I didn't expect . . . someone quite as young . . ." Lamely I added: "And beautiful."

Beautiful she was. And young she

was. About twenty-five, I figured, with blue eyes, and a white skin like the inside of an apple, and pouting red lips, and clean sweeping eyebrows, and blonde blonde hair piled over her head in beautiful waves that shone like gold in the harsh white light. Her voice was low, deep, musical.

"Young?" she said. "I'm twenty-seven. I was married to Mr. Malamed for two years. We were quite happy. I've told all of this to Lieutenant Parker, but if there are any other vital statistics that I can supply, I'd be most happy."

"No," I said. "No, thank you."

"Then, if you'll excuse me, I have many things to attend to, Mr. Chambers . . ."

"Yes, of course, Mrs. Malamed . . ."

She looked from the shot glass, to me, to Tobias, turned and walked off toward the inner room. She was almost as good from the back as from the front.

"Tell her I left," I said to Tobias.

"What?"

"Tell her I left."

"Aren't you?"

"No. I'm leaving you, but I'm not leaving. I'm going" — I pointed — "upstairs."

I put a twenty on the bar. "Now, kindly don't be insulted. This is business, a business deduction. It's for you to say — in case of emergency — that I said goodbye, started for the doors, that you turned your back and went to work on the glasses.

If I happened to sneak back — how would you know?"

"But Mr. Chambers . . ."

"Take the twenty, Tobias. I'm going up to talk to Irene."

I went. But I didn't go to Irene. I by-passed the middle room, and the toilets, and I didn't go to the back room. I went to the front room, which turned out to be a lavishly-furnished, large studio room with slanting glass facing north for a ceiling. I mosied. I peeked. I searched. I poked. I made like a hundred percent private eye hot on the trail of nothing. In a drawer of a dressing table I found a jewel box. When I lifted the top, it opened to three stuck-out compartments like a little step ladder. There was a good deal of gleaming junk in it, some of it quite expensive. In the lower compartment there was a flat velvet box. It contained a large gold medal about three inches across and about a half inch thick. I took it out and examined it. Just from its weight it must have been worth three-four hundred dollars. One side of it had engraved crossed pistols, beneath that the initials C.M. The reverse side said *Target Club Competition, First Prize, June 15, 1952*. I slipped the medal into my pocket, shut the velvet box, put it back into the jewel case, closed that and stuffed it back into the drawer. I tried another drawer. A voice behind me said:

"Looking for something special, Mr. Chambers?"

I twisted around. Claire Malamed had a black automatic in her hand and a funny look in her eye.

"No," I said. "Nothing special."

"Get out of here. Quickly, please."

"I'm not finished yet, Mrs. Malamed."

"You're finished." The automatic dipped and came up again.

I began to move toward her. "I've been retained to look into Mr. Malamed's murder. That's what I'm doing here, looking into Mr. Malamed's murder."

"You're trespassing."

"Am I?"

"Get out, and get out quickly."

Her soft voice moved up a peg. "And don't come a step nearer to me."

I kept walking. Toward her. "I don't think you'll pull that trigger."

"Won't I, though? I'm within my rights, and you know it."

"I'm gambling you don't."

"Don't come near me."

I didn't stop. I lost my gamble.

She pulled at the trigger. I saw the knuckle of her forefinger go white with pressure.

Nothing happened.

She squeezed at it again.

Nothing happened again.

I was near enough. I slapped the gun from her hand and picked it up. I looked at it, emptied the clip and threw the gun on a divan.

"Automatics don't shoot," I said, "with the safety catch on."

I tried for a short, curt, military bow, and I got out of there.

V

The Horseshoe was a narrow white-walled slot set in between a huge dour warehouse and a clip joint with strippers. There was a narrow plastic-topped eating bar with six fixed oscillating stools, two little tables and a telephone booth. Nothing more. There was no room for anything more. The only customer was the boss, seated at one of the stools, a thick-mugged cup of coffee in front of him. He was speaking to the counter-man, tall and very slender, wrapped in a white apron and wearing a white overseas-style hat. The counter-man's eyes were squinting in agitated grief, and his Adam's apple had more jumps than the navel of a belly-dancer.

"This is the pay-off," Frankie Hines was saying. "When a man don't like the coffee in his own coffee pot, maybe it's time to change up the help around here."

"But, Mr. Hines! I just made that coffee ten minutes ago."

"What'd you use to make it with? Buckshot?"

I coughed. I said, "Mr. Hines?"

Frankie whirled around. "Yeah? What's it to you?"

"My name's Peter Chambers."

"Oh, yeah, yeah. The hero of the Long-Malamed. The private eye. Yeah, yeah." He looked at me coldly. "What do you want here?"

"Talk."

"With me?"

"If you please, Mr. Hines."

"What can we talk about?"

"Let's talk and find out, huh? Let's try. How about one of these little tables?"

"Sure thing."

He moved and we sat at one of the tables. I said, "I've been retained, privately, on that Joe Malamed thing."

"Yeah?"

"You're one of the suspects, Mr. Hines."

"Not me, fella. They gave me that paraffin job down there, and I came out clean."

"So did everyone else. Which sets you all up as suspects again."

He contemplated that. "You know," he said. "You got something there." Then he smiled. "Only with me" — shrug — "no motive."

"There's a question about that."

"Is there?"

"Did you tell the police, Mr. Hines, about your argument with Mr. Malamed?"

"Now look here —"

"Did you tell them that you threatened him?"

"Now look, fella —"

"I didn't either, Mr. Hines."

He sat back, a little man with shrewd eyes, and a sun-baked wrinkled face. "Why?" he said. "Why didn't you?"

"Because, I'm not put together that way. I don't put a man on the spot, unless the spot fits. I don't know, yet, about you."

"Thanks. You're a right guy."

"Do we talk, Mr. Hines?"

"You bet your saddle boots we

do, Mr. — Mr. — what did you say your name was."

"Peter Chambers."

"You bet your boots we do, Pete. You ask the questions, pal."

"What was the argument about?"

He brought out cigarettes, offered one to me, and we smoked. "Two months ago," he said, "down in Florida, he went for a bundle on the hayburners. He didn't want to wire to New York for more cabbage — didn't want his wife to know he got cleaned. I lent him fifteen G's."

"Fifteen thousand dollars? Just like that?"

"Oh, I took his I.O.U. and there was a nice little piece of change for a bonus. Now, when I come back up north and present my marker, he keeps stalling me."

"Maybe he couldn't afford to pay?"

"He could afford it, all right."

"How would you know?"

"There's a lot of things I know, Mr. Chambers. I know that night club was a paying proposition. I know he lived high, wide and handsome. I know he carried two hundred thousand dollars worth of insurance for that young wife of his. And I know, only last week, he bought a five thousand dollar mink coat."

"For his wife?"

"His wife is *got* a mink coat. No. For that doll, the singer, Ruth Whatever-her-name-is. I ain't good at names, Mr. . . . Mr. . . ."

"Quite a guy, Mr. Joe Malamed."

"And his partner didn't like no part of that."

"Melvin Long?"

"Yeah, Melvin. You want to know why?"

"I do."

"Because that Melvin's crazy about that chick. You know her, Ruthie?"

"No, I don't. By the way, did you attend Long's cocktail party a few days ago?"

"Bet your saddle boots I did. What a shindig. Why?"

"Just asking. You know a hell of a lot about these people, don't you?"

"Know a hell of a lot more, but right now I ain't talking. I got a fifteen-thousand-dollar investment to protect. I'm going to make one last pitch for it tonight. If I don't get it — stand by for a load of information that'll have your ears buzzing. Where you going to be later on?"

"Tell you in a minute." I looked at my watch. "Hold it, huh?"

I got up and went to the phone books hanging from a hook near the booth. I checked Charles Morse's number, and I called him. I explained the situation and asked him if I could come over for a chat. He was very cordial, informed me that he would be at home, working, for the remainder of the afternoon, and that I would be welcome at any time. I thanked him, hung up and went out to Frankie.

I said, "I'll be on the town for maybe an hour or two. After that, home until midnight. That okay?"

"Fine. What's the phone number?"

I wrote out my phone number and gave it to him.

"Fine," he said, "fine. I got a hunch if I spill my information, you're going to have your killer, Mr. . . . Mr. . . ."

"Chambers." I took back the sheet and wrote my name over the number. "Just so you don't forget," I said.

"You're going to have your killer, or you're going to come pretty close. That's my hunch, Peter."

"I hope you're right. What's wrong with right now for the information?"

"Got an investment to protect."

"It's up to you, Frankie."

"It's always up to Frankie."

I left him working up a new head of steam about the coffee for the counterman.

VI

Fifteen East Nineteenth Street is near enough to Two Forty Centre Street, which is Police Headquarters. Louis Parker operated out of Headquarters so I dropped in on him first and found him desk high in paper work.

"Don't ask me how goes it," he said, "because the answer is the same. It stinks."

"Nothing new?"

"I told you ballistics proved up the murder gun, didn't I?"

"You didn't, but I assumed as much."

"You got anything for me, Pete?"

"Not yet. Not anything new."

Parker scrubbed at his head. He looked down at a sheet in front of him. "What have we got? We got it narrowed down to one table. What have we got there?"

"Claire Malamed, Charles Morse, Ruth Benson, Frank Hines, Melvin Long. Whodunit, Professor?"

He scrubbed harder. "Search me. The wife? Why should she? She's sitting pretty, married to a very rich man. The book critic? Why should he? Plus he wouldn't plant the murder gun in his own pocket. The singer? Why should she? What would she have to gain? The ex-jockey? Don't figure, he was an old friend. The partner? Why should he? Plus he's supposed to have a phobia about guns. He says. What a mess, huh?"

"What about the gun?"

"No prints except what supposed to be on it. The rest, just smudges."

"You told me that too, Louis. I mean have you traced it yet?"

He wrinkled his eyes at me. "You keep bothering me with that one question. Why?"

"Just asking, Louis."

"Just asking — why?"

"Well, a gun ought to be easy to trace."

"Ought it to be?" His hand slammed down on the desk. "Well, this one ain't. Nothing is easy in this miserable case."

"Good bye, Lieutenant. You're in no humor for casual chit-chat."

Charles Morse's studio was warm

and book-lined and thick-rugged. Charles Morse worked his cigarette through an ivory holder. He was lavish with his whiskey and that is always good by me.

"I've found the Long-Malamed a nice spot, Mr. Chambers," he said. "Strange as it may seem, a book critic works hard, and needs relaxation like anybody else."

"Yes. I presume so." I sipped excellent scotch.

"A good many of us are frustrated writers. And I'm one of those. Our creative abilities just don't measure up to our critical tastes." He deposited ash in a tray. "So — under the yoke of my permanent frustration — I'm a pretty good customer at drinking bars, and I've been an excellent customer of the Long-Malamed ever since it opened. Which brings me to the reply to your question. Yes, I know most of the people at the club fairly well."

"Was there — well, any disharmony — that you know of?"

"No — not really." His brows came together in thought and he flipped a fingernail at his mustache. He was a handsome man. "There was a bit of a controversy about a week ago, between Mr. Long and Mr. Malamed. The bartender, Tobias, was present at the time, and I was rather, well, an interested observer. Both men were drinking, and I wouldn't want to give it undue importance. But there was some sort of dispute."

"How did it wind up?"

"Mr. Malamed threatened Mr. Long, and Mr. Long laughed it off."

"*Malamed* threatened *Long*? Now there's a switch."

He smiled. "I didn't think it had any bearing on the case."

"Do you know what the argument was about?"

"It concerned a young lady. Ruth Benson. Do you know her? The young lady who sings."

"Yeah, Ruth Benson. Now what was the argument about, Mr. Morse?"

"I really don't know."

"I see." I set down the glass, uncrossed my legs, got up and we shook hands. "Thanks for your help, sir."

"Not at all, Mr. Chambers. I wasn't of any help really, I know that. But if there's anything I can do, at any time — please don't hesitate. I'm at the Long-Malamed practically every night."

"Thanks. Thanks, again."

I went home. I called my office for messages but my secretary was gone for the day. I thought about the fact that I was certainly giving Joe Malamed my exclusive interest. But then I had accepted a one grand fee to discover exactly who had knocked off Joe Malamed. I shrugged and took a bath.

I lay long and smoked many cigarettes, littering the bathroom floor. Then I got out, rubbed down, cleaned up the bathroom floor and shaved. I went to the bedroom and set the clock for eleven, and at

eleven it woke me. I yawned, went to shave, realized I had already shaved, went to the kitchen and raided the refrigerator. I cleaned up the dishes and dressed. I wore a formal navy blue suit because come what may on the Malamed thing, there was going to be a prize. I had a date with Miss Whitney come closing time.

I was at the door, going out, when the phone rang. I bulled back like a wrestler who suddenly discovers he's not in a fix. I caught the phone at its last ring.

"Hello," I said. "Hello."

"Hey. I thought you wasn't home."

"Who's this?"

"Frankie Hines."

"I'm glad you called."

"You're going to be gladder. Look, I'm in my joint, the Horseshoe. They ain't nobody here, no counter-man, no kitchen help, no nobody. I'm alone, and I'm waiting for you. I want to talk with you."

"Fine. I'll be right there."

"The faster the better. I been pushed around plenty, and I'm ready now for some pushing around on my own. I'll show —"

There were four shots.

I heard them as clearly as though I were there.

Then I heard a grunt that turned to a gasp, the sliding of a body along the phone booth wall, a thump, and the awful lonely knocking of a phone receiver, swinging, unheld.

I hung up and dialed Headquarters right away.

VII

When I got to the Horseshoe, it was teeming with cops, prowling cars askew at the curb, and a crowd already collected. I shoved through, got sass from a young cop, returned the sass but softly, explained who I was, and he ushered me in to Louis Parker, hat on back of his head, busy with details.

"You again?" Louis said without enthusiasm.

The young cop saluted. "He said he knows you, Lieutenant."

"Okay, okay," Louis said impatiently.

"Yes, sir," said the cop, saluting again, but not quite as smartly. He turned and went back into the street.

"This is a new wrinkle," Louis said. "I can't get called into a case without running into you."

"I called you, Louis."

"How's that?"

"I called you."

"You called me?" He was suddenly interested. His hat moved forward on his head. "How come?"

"I was talking to Hines when the shooting started."

"You mean you were here?"

"On the phone."

"How come?"

"He called me. At home."

"What about?"

"Something," I said, "about collecting fifteen thousand dollars that Joe Malamed owed him."

"We found an I.O.U. in his wallet for that amount. From Malamed,

to him. You mean he was going to retain you to try to collect?"

"Yeah. Something like that."

"What time was it?"

"About five to twelve. How'd he get it, Louis?"

"A forty-five. Three bullets."

"Trace the gun yet, Louis?"

"We just got here, for God's sake. Furthermore, there ain't no gun. Nobody kindly left a gun."

"I don't mean this gun. I mean the one that got Joe Malamed?"

He came very close to me. The hat went back on his head. He said very quietly: "What the hell is this extraordinary interest in our tracing that gun?"

"Just asking, Lieutenant."

"I don't believe you. What's that gun got to do with you?"

"Nothing, Louis."

"Something's tickling you about that gun, Pete. You want to tell me?"

"Nothing's tickling, Louis."

"Okay. Anything else you want to tell me? About this one here. This Frankie Hines."

"There's nothing else I know."

His face tightened. "I doubt that." Then he said: "Okay. Blow. I don't need you around here. I got work."

"Louis . . ." I said, aggrieved.

"Blow."

I blew. I walked across town and up to the Long-Malamed. The bar was loaded three deep. I gave my hat and coat to Irene and she returned a small wolf-whistle.

"Handsome tonight! All dressed

up in the blue serge, and all."

"Special for you, beautiful."

"Well, thanks."

"How's Yale?"

"Called me twice today. How many times did you call?"

"Who gave you nylons?"

She grinned, and the way she grinned, it's the sweetest thing that can happen to any face. "I'm wearing them."

I looked down and I loved it. Nylons are nylons, but nylons on Irene are the way that the guy that invented nylons dreamed that nylons should look, and he'd have to be a pretty good dreamer at that.

Customers with coats interrupted my reverie.

"See you," I said.

I called for my drink to Tobias, and it was handed to me in a relay of three bar-flies. The third was Charles Morse. "Nothing like a murder to stimulate business," he said. "Is there?"

"Nope." I took my drink. "What are you doing out here?"

"Can't get in back there. They're capacity."

I could hear Ruth Benson singing in the inner room.

"She almost finished?" I asked.

He listened. "Yes. This is her last song." He smiled. Sadly. "I know the routines here pretty well." He raised his glass. "Skoal." We both drank.

"Melvin Long here?" I asked.

"He's somewhere in the rear."

"And Mrs. Malamed?"

"She was called downtown. Further police questioning. Those details never end."

"Lieutenant Parker?"

He shook his head. "This time it's the D.A.'s office."

"I want to talk with her myself, though, between you and me, I don't think she loves me overly. I want to talk with you some more too, and with Ruth Benson, and Melvin Long" — I looked about — "but this is no place to talk."

"Here she is now."

Ruth Benson came through to the cocktail lounge. She was tall and very dark, with a rich warm skin, an oval face, black up-tilted eyes, and black hair worn in a braid like a crown over her head.

"Excuse me," I said. I went to her. "Miss Benson?"

"Yes?"

"My name is Peter Chambers. I'm a private detective."

"So?"

"I've been retained on that Joe Malamed thing. Can I talk with you?"

"Of course."

"Can you get out for a few minutes?"

"I don't understand."

"If we could go somewhere where it's a little quieter . . ."

"Oh. Yes. If you wish."

She had a flat monotonous controlled voice. You couldn't tell what she was thinking from the way she talked. You couldn't tell from her expression either. Make-up covered

her face like a tarpaulin over a rainy infield. Her cheeks were smooth, powdered brown, her full lips were dark red with a purple cast, her eyelashes were long and heavy, and there was a shining dark cream over the lids. There were wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. She said, "Excuse me. I'll be with you in a moment."

She disappeared, and came back with a wrap. I decided to forego my hat and coat. I took her arm and we moved toward the door. Irene threw me a look that could kill at fifty paces, but I ducked. I pushed open the door, and the doorman opened a cab door for us. We went to Pete and Jerry's Patch on Fifty-seventh where it was quiet and we could talk. We took a back table. I ordered scotch and water. She ordered a double stinger. She removed her wrap. Her off-the-shoulder dress was of black satin, cut deep. Her shoulders were smooth and dark and her arms were slender but round. She leaned toward me. Her breasts were almost completely exposed, full and smooth and dark, and heaving.

"What is it, Mr. Chambers? What can I do for you?"

"I don't know. Yet. If you'll forgive me, I'll come right to the point."

"Please do."

"You know that I'm investigating Malamed's murder."

"So you told me."

"Two things, Miss Benson. If you don't want to answer, you can tell me to go fly a kite."

The waiter brought the drinks. She drank hers quickly.

"Two things, Mr. Chambers?"

"First, I've been informed that Joe Malamed recently purchased a mink coat. For you. Second, I heard that Malamed and Melvin Long had an argument. About you. Want to talk about any of that?"

Again she drank of the stinger. "Yes."

"Fine. Did you accept a mink coat from Malamed?"

"Yes."

"His wife know about this?"

"I don't think so."

"Want to talk more about it?"

"Yes, I do." She finished the drink, pushed the glass away. "I loved Joe Malamed."

I wove an aimless design of wet circles on the table with the bottom of my glass.

She said, "I know what you're thinking. I met Joe before he was married, in Miami. I went for him, hook, line and sinker. He went for me too. It was hot and heavy for a while, and then he met Claire. She came down as part of a chorus line, a cute kid from a rather good family. He made a big play for her. When I saw the way it was, I quit — I was working in his club at the time. I went to Havana, and then I took an engagement in Paris — Spivy's. When I got back to New York, they were married, and he'd bought the Long-Malamed with Melvin."

"And how was it between you, then, when you returned?"

"Bad as ever. Really just as bad."

"Even though he was married?"

She cried peculiarly. Her eyes were shaped so that the inside corners pointed downward. The tears were wet straight lines down her nose. She was crying bitterly, but her face remained the same, as did her voice. Only the quickened movements of her dark naked bosom showed her agitation.

"I loved Joe Malamed. And he loved me. I've been around a long time, Mr. Chambers. Joe was a complex man. It is very possible that he was deeply in love with Claire too. She's much younger than I am, and a far different type. I won't even say I was jealous." She paused and took a deep breath. "Maybe I've been around too long, but there's one thing I've learned in life. You can't have it all. Of anything. I loved Joe Malamed, and Joe loved me, and that was that, period."

I gave her my handkerchief and she dabbed at her face.

I said, "Do you think Claire knew?"

"I don't think so. I wouldn't care if she did. But I don't think so. Joe was too smart for that and, in a way, too kind."

"Do you think she loved him?"

"I wouldn't know. Really, I wasn't interested."

"But — I mean — the guy's wife?"

"The moral aspects are beyond me. Claire Malamed was something away, outside. Joe Malamed was for me, and whatever he did, he did —

I couldn't cut Joe away from me any more than I could cut my head off. If you disapprove, I don't give a damn. I'm giving you the facts, and I don't care how you feel about them. I'm telling you because it might help. I've never been vengeful, but whoever killed Joe Malamed — I want that person dead. I'd do it myself."

"I understand."

"I'm glad I'm working. I'm glad I can come in there and sing. I'd go crazy if I didn't. Working and . . ." She looked at the empty cocktail glass.

I waved to the waiter for refills.

"And Melvin Long? His argument with Malamed?"

"Oh, that."

"It might have some bearing, Miss Benson?"

"Do you think it could have been Melvin?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know."

"What about the argument?"

The waiter brought the new drinks and took away the old glasses. Ruth Benson sipped, her black eyes shining over the rim of the glass.

"He's in love with me."

"Melvin?"

She sipped again, set the glass down. "Melvin. I could be his mother. I don't mean in years — but I could be his mother. A sweet, spoiled kid."

"Did Joe know?"

"He thought it was funny."

"Then why the argument?"

"Melvin had told Joe that I had been at his apartment. That riled Joe, for a minute, and they had words. Joe forgot it, fast."

"Joe threatened him. He was heard threatening him."

"Maybe he did. He might have told him he'd knock his teeth in, something like that, but I bet he forgot it ten minutes later."

"Did you know Frankie Hines?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that Joe owed Frankie fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Joe never welshed on a debt in his life."

"He was in the process of welshed on Frankie."

"That's a lie."

"Easy, Miss Benson. I happen to know that he owed Frankie the money, and that he was stalling on paying. And he could afford to pay."

"Right, Mr. Chambers. Right on both counts."

"Yet you say he never welshed a debt in his life."

"Right, there, too."

"Is that supposed to make sense?" I asked.

"You bet your life. Joe was down there, on a vacation, playing horses at Tropical. Joe was a big bettor, never threw it into the machines. He'd sit in the clubhouse and make last minute bets with a bookmaker. It would be too late to go into the machines to knock the price down. Many big bettors operate like that."

"I know that they do."

"He went for about sixty thousand dollars."

"What's that got to do with Frankie Hines?"

"Frankie was touting him."

"What does that mean?"

"Lots of big gamblers don't know too much about horses. They get a guy they trust, who knows the game, and they depend on his advice."

"I know that too."

"Frankie recommended the bookmaker."

"What's that got to do with Frankie's fifteen thousand?"

"Joe lost sixty thousand dollars. Then he borrowed fifteen from Frankie and he lost that too. That was enough. He had it. He came back north. Back here, a syndicate slob straightened him out, told him he'd been taken."

"How?"

"Frankie's bookmaker was a nobody, big flash, no protection, no organization. A shill. He and Frankie played footsie. They took Joe. Frankie gave Joe bum steers, Joe bet the bookmaker, and Frankie and the bookmaker split Joe's losings."

"How do you know all this?"

"Did you ever hear of Three-fingered Gray?"

"Yeah. Boss man in Miami."

"He's been sick. An old friend of Joe's. He's holed up in an estate in Orlando. Joe sent me down to Gray with the whole story. The bookmaker's name — the shill — is Sylvan Dell. Gray hauled him in. The guy

spilled his story. Gray was coming up here to see doctors. He was bringing Dell with him. They were due here this week. That's why Joe was stalling Frankie Hines. He didn't want to tip his hand until he could face him with this Sylvan Dell."

"I understand," I said. "Fully."

I sat back and drank scotch. She had stopped crying. She returned my handkerchief. The waiter came up and I paid the check. She had some stinger left, and she killed that. I had no scotch.

I said, "Just one little bit more, please."

"Sure."

"You said that Melvin had told Joe you were at his apartment. Was that true?"

"Yes, it was."

"Do you want to tell me about that?"

"Of course. The kid was beginning to give me a hard time, pawing around. I had to set him straight, but it was tough to do, working in the club. One night, last week, we had a few drinks together, and he asked me to come over to his place. I accepted, because I wanted to flatten that out once and for all. He's got a beautiful place, way up, overlooking the park. We had a few more drinks up there, and then he started making with the pitch out on the terrace. I stopped him, and I told him off."

"How'd he take it?"

"Not too good. He was practically feeling no pain at the time. He got

crazy-eyed, you know, all melodramatic. All of a sudden, he runs inside and comes back with a gun. Now he's going to kill himself, finish it off. You know these kids when they've got one too many in them. I talked him down, easy-like, and finally, I took the gun away from him. I never handled one of them in my life. I'm moving away from him, holding it, when all of a sudden, I must have touched something wrong. It went off."

"Anybody hurt?"

"I thought so for a moment."

"Why?"

"He dropped. I thought I'd shot him. I bent over him, and he was out, cold. I looked for blood, something, but he wasn't hurt. He'd just plain fainted, and me with that thing in my hand. I ran inside, put the gun in a drawer somewhere, under some things, and I brought out water. Nothing helped. I almost drowned him. He stayed out. Then I tried brandy. Finally—I must have poured a ton of brandy down his throat—he came to."

"He's got a phobia about guns."

"You're telling me." She looked at her watch. "I've got to get back. Is there anything else? Anything at all?"

"Nothing," I said. And then, without looking at her, scrunching up from the table, I said, "I'm sorry about Joe, real sorry, Miss Benson."

VIII

The Long-Malamed was still

crowded. Ruth Benson went directly to the back room. Irene Whitney made a face at me, but there was something extra-special in the face. Could be my excursion with Ruth Benson was going to do me more good with Irene than with the murder of Joe Malamed.

I pushed through to Tobias. I said, "Where's Morse?"

"Got a seat inside."

"Mrs. Malamed?"

"Still downtown."

"Melvin?"

"Here I am," Melvin said, touching my shoulder.

"Can we go upstairs, you and I, where we can talk?"

"Sure."

"Just a minute." I leaned over to Tobias. "When you get a chance, and you get a free waiter, tell Morse I'm upstairs with Melvin, to come up and join us."

"Okay, Mr. Chambers."

Melvin took me upstairs to the room that had been Joe Malamed's. It was an all-male room, with a fireplace, and heavy oak furniture.

"Melvin," I said. "Why didn't you tell me there was trouble between you and Joe Malamed?"

"It wouldn't have helped. In finding your murderer."

"Wouldn't it? And why didn't you tell me about Ruth Benson?"

"Now, look, Mr. Chambers—"

"Why didn't you tell me, Melvin? You hired me. You must have figured me for a pretty smart guy. You must have figured I'd find out.

Why didn't you tell me, Melvin?"

"Because it was none of your business, that's why."

"Wasn't it?"

"If I thought it would be of any help, I'd have told you. I don't believe in washing dirty linen in public." His face got creased up and his fidgety fingers came out shaking. "Look, Mr. Chambers, I didn't kill Joe Malamed."

From the doorway, Charles Morse said: "They want you downstairs, Mr. Long."

Melvin's hands dropped to his sides, and he looked toward me. "Is it all right?"

"Sure, Melvin."

His head swivelled from me to Morse to me, and then he turned and walked out quickly.

Morse dropped into an easy chair near the door. "I heard, Mr. Chambers."

"Heard what?"

"His denial. Didn't you accuse him of murder?"

"Nope," I said. "I'm accusing you."

"I beg your pardon."

"I'm accusing you. Of the murder of Joe Malamed."

He squinted at me a moment, and smiled. He had his ivory holder out. He dropped it back in his pocket and stood up.

"Is this some new method of questioning?"

"Nope. It's a statement of fact."

"I murdered Joe Malamed?"

"That's right."

"You'd better tell me what's on your mind, Chambers," he said, quietly.

I wondered whether he was wearing a gun, but it was too late now for wonder. "One group," I said, "at one table, could have killed Joe Malamed. Someone of that group. You know that?"

"Very well. I also know that unless you can prove beyond a reasonable doubt *which* one at that table did so, legally, there's no case."

"I'll proceed to do so."

"You have my rapt attention, Mr. Chambers."

I moved close, close enough in case of action. "At the table, we have Ruth Benson, Frankie Hines, Melvin Long, Claire Malamed, and you."

"So far, so good."

"We'll first eliminate Ruth Benson."

"Why?"

"Because she was wholly, completely and irrevocably in love with Joe Malamed. She'd have rather killed herself than him. Agreed?"

"I'll take your word for it."

"We'll eliminate, next, Frankie Hines."

"Why?"

"Because he's dead, killed by the same one that killed Malamed."

"I can't accept that, or — shall we say — I accept it with reservations."

"Next we eliminate Melvin Long. Because he has a phobia about guns. His statements to that effect have

been positively corroborated by one whose paramount interest is the death of the killer. Whom does that leave, Mr. Morse?"

The smile was still there.

"According to you — Claire Malamed and myself."

"Very good, Mr. Morse. You have an orderly mind."

Then I made my first move to obliterate his smile. I dipped into my pocket and brought up the gold medal I had rescued from Claire Malamed's treasure chest. It worked. The smile went away and never came back. A vein in his temple began to dance.

I held up the gold medal. It glinted in the light.

"The police," I said, "have been busy working on routine. Sooner or later, it will come to them. Whoever killed Joe Malamed had to be an expert marksman. One shot, remember, from the inner room. One little bullet, and wham — Joe Malamed was dead, a bullet through his temple. So . . . our quarry is an expert marksman."

"What do you have in your hand?"

"A medal for marksmanship. Target Club Competition. Awarded to C. M. This was found in Claire Malamed's jewel box."

He was beginning to squirm. "Even if true, that would involve Claire Malamed, not me."

"Uh uh," I said. "Claire Malamed knows nothing about guns. She tried to pop me with an automatic, and

didn't even know enough to spring the safety catch. Your initials are C. M., Mr. Morse. You won this medal. It won't take much investigation to prove that. You're our marksman, pal. There isn't another one at that table that could shoot a gun that expertly. The cops will come to it soon enough, and then you're it, Mr. Morse, you're double it."

"And so far this has been your own, solitary venture?"

"So far, but not for long."

"Thanks," he said. He flipped open his jacket. He wore a belt holster. A large forty-five, competently held, looked at me. I looked back at it. "It's pleasant to know," he said, "that no one else, so far, has come to these conclusions. Perhaps no one else will, without prompting from you. And I'll do what I can, within reason of course, to prevent you from prompting."

"Easy, pal," I said. "Would you like me to go on, or would you like to finish off the prompter, promptly? I'd suggest you wait for Calvin and his drums. He does pretty good to screen off the sound of a shot."

"Sure," he said pleasantly. "Go ahead. I'm not really worried about screening shots this time. We had a talk and split up, and I doubled back and found you sneaking around here, and you got tough, and I used a gun for which I have a perfectly valid license. Mrs. Malamed will verify the fact that you've sneaked around before."

"Who's going to make the speeches, pal — you or me?"

"You. For the nonce."

"Okay. The medal. Rather valuable. You gave it to Mrs. Malamed."

"Why?"

"Token of affection. Like a fraternity pin, or Air Force wings. You two are — how do they say it? — thataway."

"How do you know that?"

"We'll come to it. Let's finish one murder first. With Malamed dead, Mrs. Malamed inherits plenty, and she cashes a two hundred thousand dollar policy. Pretty good?"

"Good, indeed."

"So you plan it carefully. Gloves and stuff. Darkness, wild lights, Calvin Cole's drums. You're even smart enough to plant the gun in your own coat pocket, just in case any latent fingerprints can be developed."

"Pretty smart yourself."

"It began to come clear to me," I said, "when Frankie Hines told me he had a hunch about the killer. But he wouldn't talk. Want to know why?"

"I'm dying to know why."

"He said he had an investment to protect. Investment. Fifteen thousand dollars that Joe owed him. Now, who would he go to for the protection of this investment? Who, Mr. Morse?"

Silence. Silence, and a black gun, and pale steady eyes.

"One person," I said. "Only one. Claire Malamed. Who else? Then he said he was going to make one last

pitch for it tonight. And he added, quote: 'If I don't get it — stand by for a load of information.' " I rubbed the flat of my palm across my mouth. "What kind of information that he could use as a crowbar to pry loose fifteen G's? Stack that up against a heavy gold medal that little Claire treasures in her jewel box. C. M. Claire Malamed. Also, Charles Morse. It figured. He was a nosey little guy. He knew about Claire's extra-marital romance. He knew about Claire and you. So he came to her. He said for her to pay up — and he'd shut up."

"Blackmail." Charles Morse made his first impulsive, involuntary statement of the night. "If she paid him once — it would never end."

"Of course. So you followed him back to his eatery, and you let him have it. Probably out of the same forty-five you're holding now. You're supposed to get rid of that, Mr. Morse."

"Right now," he said, "it's safest with me. There are numbers and things to be filed off before disposing of it. Please remember, this was an emergency usage."

I grinned, suddenly, and I thumbed my nose. "Got you, pal."

"Got me?"

"Sure. You can't use the gun you're holding no matter how much you want to. It'd tie you right up to Frankie's murder. Work your way out of that one, book critic."

I had thrown him a curve and it confused him. He wavered. For just

one instant. I had inched my way near enough to take advantage of that one instant. After all, I'm in the business. I hit his gun hand with my left and I hit his jaw with my right. The left worked. The gun splattered to the floor. The right left him gaping, but he was still on his feet. I waved the left again, big in his face, and as he ducked, the right caught him, good this time, flush on the mouth. He went down, spluttering blood. I reached for the gun — and looked up to Mrs. Claire Malamed, mink coat and all, in the doorway.

"What . . . ?" she said.

"Downstairs, lady. You and your beautiful boy friend."

He got up, quivering. The blood was leaking down his chin. He fluttered a hand for a handkerchief.

"Nope," I said. "No toiletries. Downstairs, the two of you."

The Long-Malamed's cocktail lounge buzzed when I herded them down the white marble stairs in front of Charles Morse's ugly black forty-five.

IX

Ernie Schmattola's was seething with people. I was seated thigh-close to Irene Whitney and many teacups had come and gone at our table. Suddenly, she turned and kissed me square on the lips. A long, lingering kiss.

"The hell with Yale," she said, "You win. Three cheers for you."

Louis Parker, across the table,

cleared his throat.

"Getting back to this pistol."

"Gimme," I said. "I'm dying to see what's so tough to trace."

Louis handed the gleaming nickel-plated pearl-handled thirty-eight revolver to me. He said, "Every possible mark of identification has been filed off. *You* trace it."

"I'm certain I can give you the name and address of the gun's owner within a half hour," I said.

"Bet?"

"Yes. A dinner at the Chambord for Irene — Miss Whitney — and myself, against my contribution of one thousand dollars to the P.A.L."

"Done," Parker said.

At this precise moment, Melvin Long came roaring down Schmattola's aisle, riotously gay or riotously drunk.

"Mr. Chambers," he called.

He stood over us, his grin so wide it lifted his ears. "I found it! Stuck away in the bureau drawer beneath my shirts."

"Found what, Mel?" I asked.

"This." He fumbled in his coat pocket and laid a twin to the nickel-plated job beside the other. There was silence for a long moment.

"And don't worry, Mr. Chambers. Don't worry about the fee. You certainly earned it."

"The fee," I said, "I've just lost, Mel."

No fee. But could I kick? I felt the pressure of Irene's thigh again, and I decided, why hell, no, I couldn't kick.





Big Talk

Alf was no psychiatrist, but it was easy to figure out a guy who was always boasting about all the women in his life.

WHEN Gil Bratcher, the photographer, first came on the night shift, he told Alf Sweeney, the reporter, "We'll get along all right, Sweeney. Just don't go around covering flophouse cuttings. I hate them scabby winos. And stay out of fag joints. I hate them swishes even

worse than the bottle babies. They make me sick in the gut." On each shift, from his first one four nights ago, he usurped the wheel of the radio car and clung to it with his huge, meaty hands until morning. "I'll tell 'em where they can stuff it if they think I'll stay on this damned night shift," he said.

BY KRIS NEVILLE

The city — lying beyond the car like a smoked-out cigar butt, stale and dead — was wholly without compassion. Only in tomorrow's headlines would the crimes and accidents and domestic tragedies of the night assume color and depth and the breath of life.

As if in answer to some obscure problem he had been silently considering, Gil announced emphatically, "They ought to put all them pansies and winos on an island out in the Pacific somewhere, and then drop one of them hydrogen bombs on 'em. Blast their damned guts halfway across the ocean."

The emotionless voices from the police radio murmured above the monotonous rhythm of the motor.

"You agree?" Gil demanded.

Alf Sweeney spat through the window. "I thought you were going to get off the night shift," he said.

"I'll get off it. Give me time."

Alf shrugged heavily. "I've been on it for two years."

The collar of the white shirt Gil had worn for three shifts was unbuttoned beneath his crudely knotted tie. Above damp lips, his tiny eyes were heavy. During conversations, he scrutinized defiantly the texture of the speaker's skin, the movement of the speaker's lips, the pulsing of the breath in the speaker's nostrils. When he entered unfamiliar buildings, his dark eyes darted about suspiciously, marking out avenues of retreat in the event he were set upon by superior force.

When the "woman screaming" call came over the radio, the photographer grunted, "Want it?" His tone was surly. His face was bloated from lack of sleep.

Alf, the reporter, was watching the darkened buildings flow past from shadows and silence into shadows and silence. He wore a green sports jacket over a solid blue sports shirt. On his bony, loose-jointed frame, the jacket seemed no better than a hand-me-down from an elder brother, and the pencil and yellow copy paper that bulged from the pocket gave his whole body an appearance of desolation and futility. His sensitive, unhandsome face was colorless but for the heavy black of his eyes and beard and eyebrows. Without looking around, he said, "Not one a week are copy."

Gil bent forward slightly. "You want it?"

Alf blinked myopically. "Let it go."

"It's up to you," Gil said. "Whatever you want to do."

"Go over there if you want to."

"You give the orders. What do you want to do?"

"Let it go, go over there," Alf said. "I don't care."

"Okay," Gil said disgustedly. "Let it go."

"Not on my account," Alf said, still watching, beyond his reach, the city slide past the car. "It's over on Temple, that's all. It'd be gone anyway."

"You give the orders."

"Let it go, then."

The car moved two blocks.

"You want me to drive now?" Alf asked.

"I'm all right," Gil said.

Calls were coming in on the radio with increasing frequency. There was a prowler at 3971 Highland; a fight outside a Hill Street bar; a drunk down at 6th and Manton; a minor traffic accident on La Brea. Car 302 out for coffee.

"I thought you might be tired," Alf said.

Wearily, Gil said, "I'm all right."

"Small stuff tonight."

"Bars close in a little while. Maybe we'll have some bloody damned traffics."

There was a drunk in a car at Wilshire and Burlington; there was a missing child, seven years old, blue eyes, brown hair, dressed in a pink frock, last seen in the Vermont area; there was a suspect number three who had a felony record but who was not presently wanted; there was a speeder heading south on Santa Monica Boulevard pursued by car 97. There was a suspect number one; no record, no want.

The car telephone began its muted whirr.

Alf's skinny neck craned alertly. He unhooked the instrument. "Yes? . . . Yes, uh-huh. Right away, right . . . Yeah, okay, I will." He returned the receiver to its prongs. "Mulvey Hospital, Gil."

Gil made a U-turn on the deserted street and headed back downtown.

"Some woman just been beat up," Alf said.

"That was the Temple Street call a while ago," Gil said. "I told you we should've gone over."

Alf spat a shred of tobacco off his tongue.

"She won't want her picture in the paper," Gil said, and laughed softly to himself. "Motel row. Maybe if she acts right, I'll see to it that she don't get any publicity."

Alf said nothing.

"They don't mind you asking. Take it from me; they don't mind." The photographer's tone was aggressive to forestall contradiction. He made moist, kissing sounds. "Maybe this one's one of them bobby-soxers. Hot stuff. I covered a motel row back in '49. Regular little tiger. The guy with her was wanted on the Bronson stick-up. She played ball, so I played ball."

"The Old Man don't go for that," Alf said.

Gil, mouth open, snorted heavily. "What the hell? What's one picture more or less?"

To the left, the bare bones of a projected apartment house cast an insubstantial shadow.

"You got a wife," Alf said quietly.

Gil chuckled confidentially. "What she don't know won't hurt her." He tilted his head and winked at the reporter. "I keep Loreen happy, see? I keep Loreen *real* happy."

Alf shrugged and lit a cigarette. The skeleton of an incompleting speedway — as yet connected to

nothing and no more than a scratch on the surface of the land — lay across the site of the old Bank of America building.

"The *Times* crew's over in the Valley," Gil said. "The *News* bunch is at the train wreck. We'll be the only ones on this one. Yep, I don't think she'll want her picture in the paper."

Alf blew smoke at the windshield. "The Old Man'll be sore as hell if the other car didn't shoot the train."

Gil ran a light at 8th. "You worry too much."

"Julian's probably out drunk," Alf said. "They said he hasn't phoned in for over an hour."

"He's at the wreck, for God's sake. Don't worry — it's his headache." He took his hands off the wheel long enough to dismiss Julian with a gesture of disgust. "Man, you're eager. All the time, eager. I could have got that leaper story last night in five minutes. What'd you want to hang around so damned long for?"

"I had to wait for the medical examiner," Alf said.

Gil laughed softly, deep in his throat. "The cop really come boiling back when I lit that firecracker right behind him, didn't he? You see him?" He patted the wheel and snorted in amusement. "Purple, by God. He was so mad he nearly busted a gut. What the hell could he do? He think he could run in a newspaperman? Huh?" He waited for approval and appreciation.

"Take it easy, Gil," Alf said.

Gil gunned the motor for a second and then eased off the accelerator. "This slow enough for you, Alf?" he said when they had gone another block. "You're the boss." The car was going fifteen miles an hour.

"Yeah," said Alf wryly.

Gil, the master, huge, sweaty, solid, snickered to himself. "Maybe this one tonight's one of them short-socks kids, huh?"

"Why don't you give somebody a break once?" Alf said curtly.

Gil stared around at the reporter in surprise. "I give 'em a break," he said. "They don't want their picture in the paper —" He rubbed his soft, heavy hands caressingly over the steering wheel. "So I ask 'em. 'Hey, babe,' I say, 'what's your phone number?' The smart ones get it right off. 'Call after eight,' they tell me, 'when the old man's at work.' Just ask anybody on the paper; they'll tell you how Gil gets it. I get all of it I want. They all take lessons from me, by God."

"I know."

"And you know what's the hottest stuff there is? Two-toned blondes. Not bottle blondes, mind you. Real blondes with brown eyes. You ever get any of that two-toned stuff?"

Alf said nothing.

"You're damn right," Gil said. "They're all nymphomaniacs. You see a real blonde with brown eyes, and you've got a nympho every time."

"Yeah, Gil," Alf said. "Sure."

Gil swung the sedan around the corner of Mulvey Street.

"I forgot," he said. "Your wife's a two-tone job, ain't she?"

Alf made a soft, small sound deep in his throat. "We can go faster than this."

"Slow down. Speed up. What the hell do you want?"

"Gil," Alf said, "you know what's wrong with you?"

"Huh?"

"You just don't like women," Alf said.

Gil sniggered softly. "That's a lot of crap." And then, more emphatically, "That's a lot of crap!"

"You trying to kid people, Gil? You think the guys on the paper didn't tumble the first time you started yapping about how many scores you make? You ever figure out exactly what it is you're trying to prove? You think yapping about what a man you are is going to fool anybody?"

"Shut your goddam mouth!"

"Or maybe," Alf said evenly, "maybe you're just trying to fool yourself."

"Shut up!" Gil yelled. He fed gas savagely. "And what the hell do you know about it? What the hell gives you the right to tell me what's wrong with me? You one of them goddamned psychiatrists or something?"

Alf let his breath out slowly. "All right," he said. "Skip it, Gil."

"What you so damn smart for? You ain't able to get anything but

home stuff. What the hell you know about it?"

Alf snubbed his cigarette out in the ash tray and turned to stare out the window. His lips trembled.

Gil watched the reporter out of the tail of his eye. "I'll show you, by God. You take this one tonight. From motel row. She'll holler her number right away. I'll have my bare feet on her back in a couple of days." He snorted again and made the moist, kissing sounds.

"Anybody ever tell you that you're a louse, Gil?"

"I told you twice to cut that kind of crap," Gil said. "Some day I'll beat your damned face in, Alf. Sure as hell."

Alf's lips drew into a thin, taut line.

There was an ambulance traffic at 124th Street; a prowler on 9th; a drunk down in a yard on Bonnie Brac. An attempted suicide on Sherbourne.

"Just don't get so damned smart," Gil said. "You want to stay on the good side of me, Alf."

He guided the car into the driveway of Mulvey Receiving. He cut the wheel sharply to the right and slammed on the brakes at the last moment, stopping the car with a jolt inches short of the retaining wall of the Press Section.

The reporter opened the door and waited half in the car and half out for Gil to get his Speed Graphic from the back seat. After the hollow, explosive sound of car doors closing,

the two of them walked in silence up the dimly lighted steps of the hospital. In the tile and white-washed corridor, Gil exchanged laughing insults with two uniformed policemen. They stopped in front of the metal guard doors of the elevator and Gil jabbed the Up button with the meaty ball of his thumb. When there was no response, he said, "Stinkin' city ought to put in a Press elevator."

The elevator announced its arrival with the metallic click of uncoupling doors. The young man responsible for its delay wore a white silk scarf as a sling for his right arm. As he stepped into the corridor he moved his left hand apologetically and nodded with a faint, self-effacing smile at the sling.

"Goddamned fairy," Gil said loudly as the doors closed behind them. He slammed his thumb at the red button for the third floor. "I can tell fairies a mile away. Ugh. They make me sick."

He jostled Alf in order to be the first out of the elevator. He sniffed importantly and hitched his camera more comfortably on his hip. Beside the drinking fountain, a white-clad orderly was finishing a cigarette. The reception hall smelled sharply of sterilization and soap and sickness, and a child was crying monotonously in one of the curtained rooms.

"Where's the dame?"

Startled, the orderly looked around. He shrugged and nodded toward the emergency room on the left.

Gil put a plate in the camera and aimed it at the door. "I'll get it from here when they wheel her out."

"How is she?" Alf asked.

"Couple of pretty bad cuts."

The high, flat table in the emergency room was partially concealed by the half-drawn curtain. The woman was lying on her side, facing away from the hall. Only the back of her head was visible above the covering sheet. Some of her hair lay in a damp pile on the floor. What had not been shaved hung in straight, blood-drenched, ropy strands that revealed a little of the natural yellow near the unstained ends. She was whimpering softly.

Smiling faintly, Gil ambled toward the doorway. The intern treating the woman came to the head of the table. When he noticed the photographer, he jerked the curtain closed savagely.

Gil reddened. "Who the hell he think he is?"

"Aw, skip it, Gil," Alf said.

"By God, I ought to go in there. I'll take my goddamned pictures while he works if I want to."

"Cut it out," the orderly said. "The doc's new."

Alf looked around the room and then started toward the policeman leaning against the coke machine.

"It's time he learns the city runs this place, then," Gil said indignantly. "Why, God damn, I ought to phone the superintendent. That punk sawbones'll learn damned quick he can't push around the press."

The crisp, starched nurse at the reception desk looked toward Gil, her face a frown of annoyance.

When Alf brought out the folded sheets of copy paper, the policeman straightened. "You bring her in?" Alf asked quietly.

"You the press?"

"Yeah. The *Star*."

"Oh, the *Star*. Yeah, me and Mick — that is, Sergeant McCabe."

Alf took their names. "When did you get the call?"

"About one o'clock. Me and Mick."

Alf nodded.

"We found her on the sidewalk. You want the address? It was — I think it was 916 Temple. In the nine hundred block — motel row. There was already a crowd when we got there. From the blood, you'd have thought she was dead."

"Uh-huh . . . ?" Alf said, writing.

"Well, this guy — she'd been at the Air Flow Motel — this guy she was shackled up with sent her out for a pint. The drug store was closed, there in the nine hundred block, but there's a liquor store three blocks up. She starts up to the liquor store, and this car — a Ford, she thinks, an old-looking coupe — well, this car pulls up. The driver tries to drag her inside and she starts screaming. He must have had the tire iron in his hand. He hits her with it. He hits her maybe half a dozen times. And then she gets up and starts to run for the motel. She falls down there at the corner — in front of the drug

store that was closed. There was already a crowd when we got there."

"She didn't recognize him, is that right?"

"Just one of them crazy bastards. You know — picks on the first dame he sees."

"Well. . . ." Alf closed the notebook. "Thanks, officer. They have her name at the desk?"

"I think they got it."

"A real looker, huh?", said Gil, as he came up to the policeman.

The officer shrugged. "She had blood all over her."

Gil nudged him. "She's out cheatin', huh? Not gettin' enough at home?"

"You from the same paper?"

"Yeah. Gil Bratcher." Gil wet his lips. "Didn't get to see what she looked like, huh? One of them anytime, all-the-time babes, I bet?"

The policeman stared coldly at him, said nothing.

Gil nudged him again, and chuckling, shook his upper arm. "Maybe her husband's a fairy, huh?"

Alf cleared his throat. "Well . . . ah . . . Thanks, officer," he said, and moved quickly away.

At the reception desk across the room Alf asked the nurse, "Do you have a card yet on the assault case?"

The nurse began to hunt through the new admission slips on her desk. "You from the press?"

"Yeah."

Gil strolled over. "Where's Jean, hey, baby?"

"She's transferred to Surgery."

"You be here from now on?"

"Probably," the nurse said.

Gil made kissing sounds loudly.

"We'll get to know each other real well. I'm with the *Star*. Gil Bratcher."

"That's nice," the nurse said. She found the card and passed it to Alf. He put it on the corner of her desk and, bending over, placed his copy paper beside it and prepared to write down the information.

"What time you get off, baby?" Gil asked.

Alf straightened up, very slowly, his eyes still on the card. "We don't

want this one, Gil," he said. "Let's go."

"Huh?"

"I think we better . . .

"Hey! What the hell is this? Let me see that card!" He reached out and scooped it up in his soft, meaty hand. "I'm looking for her phone number."

Alf glanced toward the room where Gil Bratcher's wife was being treated for scalp wounds. "I'll see it's killed on the city desk," he said. "No one has to know about it. Just you and me."



because

of the unforeseen demand for *Manhunt* at newsstands all over the country, and because many readers were disappointed when told the magazine had sold out, we're extending our original subscription offer so that you'll be sure of getting every one of the next twelve issues. For your convenience, we've prepared the coupon below.

Please send me the next twelve issues of *Manhunt* for which I enclose my ☐ check for \$4.00

☐ money order

Name	Mail subscriptions to:
Address	MANHUNT
.....	545 Fifth Avenue
.....	New York 17, New York

Be My Guest

Quite a card, that Calligy. Always joking about murder — and about other guys making time with Rocky's wife.

BY ROBERT TURNER

THINGS have been real nice since I got out of the Fights. Retired, Janie calls it. Just like I'd been a big business man or something. That's one thing I like about Janie, her sense of humor. Lot of guys might think she was too quiet. Not me. I like Janie. She's a swell wife. It was her idea we come way up here to Maine and buy this place, miles from nowhere, where we don't even get mail or see anybody maybe weeks on end, and I go the thirty miles into town for supplies about once a month. It's kind of primitive, no electricity, no phone, getting water from a well and all. But it's fun. It's nice.



We don't get lonesome. Except right after Mr. Calligy was here.

That was a funny one, him coming here. I never did really find out why he came. Of course he gave me a silly reason, kidding around the way Mr. Calligy and all those guys from the rackets do. You never hardly get a straight answer out of guys like him. I remember the first thing I said, when he drove up and stepped out of that big car of his:

"Well, Mr. Calligy," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you say, Rocky?" he answered. "I'm hidin' from the cops. No kiddin', Rocky, what do you think of that? I'm wanted for murder, for killing that big schnook of a manager of yours, Leo Mace. Remember Leo? Well, say a prayer for him, Rocky. He's dead. I knocked him off."

I looked at him. He didn't look so good. His expensive suit was all rumpled and he needed a shave. Those heavy-hooded eyes of his were all bloodshot and tired, too. I said: "You kiddin', Mr. Calligy?" As soon as I asked, I knew it was a foolish question. Guys like Mr. Calligy, in the rackets, don't go around knocking people off. They're like business men, not like the old gangster movies. Mr. Calligy maybe mixes in the numbers business, fixes a few fights like that last one of mine. But none of this strong-arm stuff.

"I wouldn't kid you, Rocky," Mr. Calligy said. "I ——"

He stopped cold, looking past me. I turned and saw that Janie had come out of the house. She was wearing shorts and a halter and she looked nice. I was real proud of Janie. Her legs were long and curved real pretty, like a chorus girl's legs and they were smoothly tanned. And that halter — well, Janie would have looked good in a burlap bag, but that halter was the end. The real end. And with her reddish hair pulled tight over her forehead and balled up in the back, with the sun shining on it like on liquid copper, Janie looked beautiful that moment. Mr. Calligy thought so, too. He said:

"Well, maybe this country life can be real invigorating, after all." He made a whistling sound. "Who's that, Rock?"

"Janie," I called. "Come meet Mr. Calligy."

She walked toward us. Her eyes never left Mr. Calligy's and her lips looked a little pursed, as though she was frightened or maybe sore about something. I couldn't figure that out. I heard her say: "I've already met Mr. Calligy, long, long ago."

"Why, sure," he said. "I remember you now, Baby. You're the little chick with the mousy look and the big horn rimmed glasses used to work for Farnsworth, the promoter."

"She just wears glasses when she reads or types or close work like that," I explained.

"Sure," Mr. Calligy said. "With or without glasses, she can do some close work for me, anytime. How about that, Janie? Like to put your glasses on and do a little close work for me some time?"

I laughed. He's a great kidder, that Mr. Calligy. All these bigshot racket guys are. But Janie was a little white around the lips. She didn't seem to get it. She said:

"How did you find us? Nobody's supposed to know where we are. Only Leo Mace knew and he wouldn't have told anybody — especially you."

"You got it figured," he told her. "Mace let me in on the little secret. Just before he died, I sort of sweated it out of him. And you know what I was going to do when I got here, honey? I was going to shoot some holes in a punching bag. You know what I mean?"

I didn't. What was he talking about? Since I quit the Fights, I don't do any training. We ain't got any punching bags, no gloves or nothing, up here in the country.

Janie said: "You can't do that. He doesn't know. He doesn't remember what happened. You can't blame him. Please!"

Now I didn't understand Janie, either. It was like they were talking double talk and it was setting my head to aching. It does that sometimes, since that last fight with Barney Phelan, when I took a dive like Mr. Calligy paid me to, especially. Sometimes I don't seem to

see too good, either. Sometimes I don't even hear right and yet at the same time I sometimes hear sounds and noises that ain't even real, Janie says. I guess she was right and I was in the Fights too long. But it paid off. Janie and I got enough money to live on, way out here in the country, the rest of our lives.

"Don't worry, kid," Mr. Calligy said to Janie. He was looking her over and over and I felt kind of proud that a bigshot like Mr. Calligy admired my wife so much. He rubbed his hands together. "Since I got here, I got other plans. Much better plans."

He looked at me. "You got a car?"

"No," I told him. "A jeep. I can drive it, too."

Mr. Calligy winced and looked at Janie. He said: "How do you stand it? What do you do, day in, day out, sit around here, listening to the sound of the bells in his crazy cranium? Hell, honey, I'll bet you're glad to see a human being, huh?"

You see what an education this Mr. Calligy had, the words he used. I laughed as though I knew what he was talking about. Janie said: "Lay off of that. Leave him alone, you hear?"

Her eyes got blazing mad. I was surprised. I said: "Aw, Janie, Mr. Calligy was just kiddin' around."

"So you got a jeep," he said. "Then when I get ready to go, I can get into town with that. Swell. I'll be back in a minute. Got to get rid

of the car, just in case anyone does come snooping around, looking for me. I passed a nice deep-looking creek, up the road about half a mile. You follow me in the jeep, Rocky."

I watched him get back into the Caddy. I looked at Janie. "What's he doing?" I saw Mr. Calligy drive off, back the way he had come, down the narrow, rutted dirt road that led out to the main highway, ten miles back.

Janie came over and threw herself into my arms. She put her head against my chest. Her fingers dug into my arm muscles. "Rocky, I'm scared," she said. She was, too. I could tell by her voice. "What are we going to do? We've got to *do* something. He'll kill you, too. Maybe not right away, but after a while."

I grinned. I liked to have her cuddle up to me like this. She was so small and soft and warm against me. "Mr. Calligy kill me?" I said. "That's silly. Why would he want to do that?"

She leaned back away from me, turned her face up toward me. I'd never seen her eyes so full and pretty, the long lashes all stuck together. "Listen, Rocky. I've got to tell you something, try to make you understand. Think hard, darling. Try to understand this."

I frowned and looked down at her and concentrated. My head hurt but I kept it up because Janie wanted me to. She said, slowly, spacing the words: "That last fight,

with Barney Phelan, remember? You got orders to take a dive. In the sixth round. But you were to let him hit you, make it look good, maybe even knock you out for real, because you were the heavy favorite and it had to look good. Remember?"

"Yeah, yeah," I said.

"And in the sixth, you gave him some openings just like you were supposed to. And he really teed off on you. You went down, twice, remember?"

"Sure. The second time, I stayed down. I was really out, cold. He—he hit me too hard. I didn't remember nothing for three days after the fight and then I was up here with you and I don't remember how we even got here."

"That's right, Rocky," she said. She nodded her head, approvingly. "Now, try to understand this. I never told you. I didn't want to worry you. Something went wrong in that sixth round after you went down the second time. You got up again, looking kind of dizzy. Phelan came at you, but he was careless, wide open. You threw a wild, heavy punch. It caught him flush and he went down. He stayed down. *You won that fight, Rocky, and you shouldn't have.* Calligy lost fifty thousand dollars. He didn't understand, either. He thought it was a double-cross you and Leo Mace pulled on him. Do you understand, Rocky? That's why he's up here. He's killed Leo and he'll kill you, too."

I stared down at her and my eyes went blurry and I couldn't see her for a moment. There was a sound like millions of grasshoppers in my ears. My head began to hurt worse and worse, so bad I could hardly stand it. Then it stopped and I said: "You're kidding me, Janie. For some reason. That *couldn't* have happened. How could it?"

She seemed to go crazy and tried to shake me, like she would a little kid. But when you're a hundred eighty pounds, a little dame like Janie has trouble shaking you. Then Mr. Calligy backed up to our driveway in his Caddy, called out the window: "What the hell are you waitin' for, bellhead? You expect me to walk all the way back from that creek?"

"He's got some crazy idea," I told Janie. "I'd better go with him."

She just stood there and watched me go, as I got into the jeep and went after Mr. Calligy in his Caddy. I kept thinking about what Janie had said. It didn't make sense. Why would I double-cross Mr. Calligy? I'd been in the business too long to think I could get away with something like that. And I'd have remembered. Unless Phelan *had* knocked me cold that second time I went down, I would have remembered, wouldn't I? Janie was a little mixed up, upset about something.

When we got to the creek, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Mr. Calligy drive the car off the little wooden bridge and into the

creek, where it quickly sunk out of sight. I shook my head. I didn't know. Everybody seemed to be acting crazy, today. I said: "What did you do that for? A nice car like that?"

"Rocky, m'boy," he said. "I can always get another car. This way, if any cops *do* come, you can hide me and there won't be any car to give things away."

He got into the jeep with me and we drove back to our place. "You mean you really are in trouble with the cops, Mr. Calligy?"

"Ha-ha," he said. "Joke."

Then I asked him about that fight with Phelan. I told him what Janie had told me. I wasn't afraid of him. When I finished, he pulled way over onto the other side of the seat and looked at me from under those hooded lids of his and twisted his thin, pink little mouth all up, as though he was trying to figure something out. "I'll be damned," he said, finally. "Leo Mace wasn't giving me any bull, then. Because you couldn't have been acting, just now. It was too perfect. I'm really beginning to think it happened like Leo said and you really didn't know what you were doing."

"What do you mean what I was doing?"

"Skip it," he said. "We'll see. In the next few days I'll be able to tell for sure."

It was kind of nice having Mr. Calligy there for company. We hadn't had any before. That night

at the supper table there was a lot of funny talk, though. Like I said, Mr. Calligy was a great kidder. You know what he kept saying? He'd say:

"Rock, old brain, what would you do if your wife ever told you some other guy tried to make her? You know, that he was fooling around with her. What would you do?"

He caught me by surprise. I had to think for a minute. I thought about Janie, and some other guy bothering her, putting his hands on her, trying to kiss her and stuff like that. Seeing that picture in my head made me a little crazy. I slammed the table with my fist so hard I broke a dish. "I'd kill him," I said. My eyes got blurry and I could almost feel myself punching this guy who'd tried to make my wife, like Mr. Calligy said, punching him until he was dead.

"You see, Janie," Mr. Calligy said. "But, Rocky, they'd electrocute you for that. That would be murder."

"I wouldn't care," I said. "I wouldn't be able to help myself. I love Janie. Nobody was ever so good to me. She's the only girl never wanted me to spend my money, who's never kidded me about bein' punchy and ugly. I'd have to kill anybody who bothered Janie, no matter what happened."

"You see, Janie," Mr. Calligy said. "He *isn't* kidding. He'd do that. And surer'n hell they'd elec-

trocute him. No more Rocky. Remember that!"

Then he'd say to me: "This is nice up here, Rocky, keed. Up here in the wilds, with a beautiful dame. Do you ever go anywhere, Rocky? I mean do you ever go into town or take any trips, leave this dump at all?"

"No, he doesn't," Janie butted in before I could answer. "When he does, I go with him."

I looked at her, wondering what she said that for. "No, you don't, Janie," I said. "You never go with me. I always go alone. You told me, even, you don't mind being here alone, that there's nothing to be afraid of, way out here."

Mr. Calligy roared with laughter. I thought he'd never stop. Soon I began to laugh with him. I knew I must've said something funny. Janie got up from the table and went out into the kitchen. When Mr. Calligy was through laughing, he hollered out there after her: "Hey, Janie, is that true you aren't afraid of anything here, without Rocky around? The wolves don't bother you or anything?"

I wanted to tell Mr. Calligy we didn't have any wolves around here, only foxes once in a while and sometimes a skunk or two, but I didn't get the chance. He was laughing too hard again.

So Mr. Calligy stayed with us a couple days and he began to look different than when he came. He got some rest and his eyes cleared

and he got some color in his face. He had a lot of expensive sport clothes out of the suitcase he'd taken from the big car. He was real sharp, a good-looking guy and I could see why he was a bigshot in the Rackets. He was real nice to me, too. I liked Mr. Calligy. Even Janie seemed to take to him a little more after a couple of days. Sometimes when I was out chopping wood or drawing water from the well and would come in again, I'd find them talking together, real quiet. Every once in awhile I'd catch her looking at Mr. Calligy with a funny look, too. I could tell she was thinking how it was funny an ex-pug like me would have bigshot friends, handsome and polished like Mr. Calligy.

He was an interesting talker, too. He was always telling us about trips he was going to take when he left here. He'd say: "I may go to Mexico. It's beautiful there, this time of year. With the kind of dough I got stashed away, I could live like a king down there. A big mansion, plenty of servants and a cute little chick to keep me company. She'd have the best of everything, plenty of clothes, a car of her own, never have to do a lick of work. Every night we'd tour the night clubs in Mexico City. Days we'd loll around the beaches, or take in some of that deep sea fishing. Boy, that's the life."

Or else maybe he'd talk about taking a boat trip around the world, or about Monte Carlo, where all the

rich people hang out in Europe, on that there, now, Riviera place, or Rio De Janeiro. And always about all the money he'd spend and the little doll who'd be with him, how she'd enjoy all that, too. Whoever his girl was, she was sure lucky.

Of course, when he'd talk like this, Mr. Calligy hardly looked at me. He sort of just talked to Janie. I guess maybe he thought I wouldn't understand, wouldn't know anything about those places, but, hell, I studied Geography when I was a kid. Most of the time, though, Janie didn't hardly seem to be listening to him. She'd just stare down at her plate. One time, she was listening, though. Mr. Calligy must've said something that reminded her of something sad because her eyes brimmed up. She said:

"Will you stop it, stop it!" And she jumped up from the table and ran out into the kitchen.

Toward the end of the week, Mr. Calligy became a bit of a pest. He was always after me to go into town for him. He was out of cigarettes or he wanted some magazines, or something. But Janie wouldn't let me go. She said it wasn't time for my regular trip, yet. The funny thing was that later Mr. Calligy would find that he had some cigarettes, didn't need any after all, or whatever it was. I guess he was just bored.

I got a little worried about Janie toward the end of that week, though. She got a little snappish and

she looked flushed all the time and at nights she wasn't like a wife should be, at all. I thought maybe she was working too hard trying to make things right for our guest, cooking too much and always cleaning up, scrubbing the floor and washing the windows and all. When I asked her about it, she didn't even answer me. That wasn't like Janie.

Sometimes, too, toward the end of the week, I'd wake up nights and find Janie wasn't there. I'd go out and find her on the front porch or out on the back stoop, looking up at the stars. She'd look real pretty with the moonlight shining on her and her nightgown so thin and all it was like only a mist was covering her. Janie looked swell in a nightgown. But she'd jump when I'd speak to her. When I'd ask her what was the matter, she'd say, quickly:

"Nothing, nothing, Rock, dear. I — I just couldn't sleep, that's all. I thought maybe a little fresh air would help."

Then we'd both be quiet and we'd hear Mr. Calligy snoring, inside, in the guest room. Suddenly Janie would whisper, real fiercely: "When is he going to go? You got to get him out of here, Rocky, before something terrible happens! I don't like him. I can't stand him. I'm afraid of him. Get him to go, please, Rocky."

"Aw, now, Janie," I'd say and take her into my arms and comfort her. "If that's the way you feel about it, I'll speak to him, tomorrow. But

you're being silly. Mr. Calligy's a nice guy. What's there to be afraid of? But I'll speak to him."

I did, several times. Mr. Calligy, he only laughed and acted like he thought I was kidding.

Then, the last night of that week, I had this nightmare. It was really bad. It seemed that I woke up and found that Janie wasn't in bed with me again. But I was getting used to that. I started to go back to sleep again. Then I heard a sort of muffled screaming sound from the front porch. I went out there and there was Janie with some guy, I couldn't see who it was, it was so dark and all. The guy had his arms around Janie and was fighting with her and her nightgown was half torn off, and her white skin shining in the dark. I ran toward them and then in the dark and confusion and all, the guy swung his elbow up and around and it caught me flush on the point of the chin. It hurt like crazy for a second and everything in me seemed to burst into fireworks and then something like a blackout came. That was the funny part about this nightmare. It must have ended right in the middle like that. You know how they do. Because I don't remember any more of it. But for the few minutes that wild dream was going on, it was terrible. Just like it was really happening.

I must have slept late the next morning. It was way after sunup when I got up and washed and dressed and went out to the kitchen,

where Janie was moving around, and I could smell bacon frying and coffee boiling. I went out and kissed her, like always. She turned toward me and stared at me. A funny kind of look. Almost as though she was scared. Then it faded.

I said: "You didn't sleep very well last night, either, huh?"

She must have been holding her breath because she let it all out at once. "It's all right, Rocky, then, I guess."

"What is?" I said. "Hey, about the nightmare I had last —"

She threw herself into my arms. "I know, Rocky, I know," she said. "Please forget about it. Please."

I guess I must have been pretty bad, probably groaning and thrashing around and all and that was how she knew about it.

Then while she was holding onto me real tight like that, she murmured something about I shouldn't ever get angry, I shouldn't ever lose my temper over anything. Not anything. I just laughed and told her: "Me? Why should I get mad at anybody?"

When Janie was all right again and moved away from me, I sat down to breakfast. We were halfway through breakfast before I realized that there was something wrong. Mr. Calligy wasn't there. He never missed breakfast. I said: "Hey, where's the bigshot? Where's Mr. Calligy?"

She kept right on eating, without

looking up. She said after a moment, "He left early this morning, before you got up. He's gone."

"Gone?" I gasped. "What a crazy guy! He didn't even say good-bye to me. He —" I stopped, remembering something. "Hey, how could he? Without a car or anything?"

"I — I took him in, in the jeep."

"Oh," I said. "You should have waked me, Janie." I was a little sore about it. "You don't drive that jeep very good, like I do."

"Rocky!" She cut me off. She stared across the table at me, her eyes kind of stern and yet soft. She said, very slowly: "Rocky, we're not ever going to discuss Mr. Calligy again. Never, Rocky. That's all."

I didn't get it but I humored her.

It was a little lonesome around there with Mr. Calligy gone. But I got over missing him. A few days after Mr. Calligy left, our well began to stink something awful. Janie told me a skunk fell into it. But when I wanted to climb down and get it out of there, she said, no, she'd never drink that water again, even if we drained the well. She made me dig a new one and fill the old one in. It's a long hard job, digging a well. I cussed that skunk out plenty while I was doing it.

That was almost five years ago. We never heard from Mr. Calligy again. The way he was so fond of me and Janie, I often thought he might come back. He never did, though.





Fan Club

BY RICHARD ELLINGTON

Evelyn had the bad habit of flitting from one man to another. And sometimes bad habits can prove pretty fatal.

THE home-town drink in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, is rum. I was having a slightly diluted glass of it at the bar in the Bamboo Room, gazing out across the shimmering sunlight of the Square at the old fort and reflecting on the changes three years had brought to the Virgin Islands in general and to St. Thomas in particular.

A lot of things hadn't been here three years ago—including the Bamboo Room and the lush young blonde on the bar stool next to mine.

Bars like the Bamboo Room are a dime a dozen, but the blonde was something else again. I'd taken a good fast look at her when she first came in, and a couple of even faster ones in the bar mirror, and then I'd tried to get interested in the old fort again. No use looking at candy if you haven't got the price.

She said, "You're not very sociable, Mr. Drake."

She couldn't have surprised me more if she'd hit me on the head with a rum bottle. I turned around to face her, and cocked an eyebrow to indicate she had the advantage.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I —"

She laughed, and suddenly all the sunshine was not out in the Square. "That's all right. I was just teasing. I saw you checking in at the West Indian, and I asked Charley Boxer who you were." She had a soft, throaty voice that smiled right along with her gray-blue eyes. "You don't look much like a private detective, do you?"

"Don't I?" I said, and realized I was gaping at her like an idiot.

Most times I can do more about a pitch from a pretty girl than gawk at her. But not now. This girl was the end. I didn't know what the minimum requirement for street clothing was in St. Thomas, but she was wearing it. She had a body that would have looked good in anything, and in skimpy blue halter and shorts it looked almost too good to be true. And her hair wasn't just yellow, I noticed; it was a pure yellow, like rich warm butter.

"Charley said you were down here for a vacation," she said.

I nodded, and got my eyes back in my head. "Couple weeks. Are you a friend of Charley Boxer's, Miss . . . ?"

"Lanier. Evelyn Lanier. Yes, you might say I'm a friend of Charley's." I got the impression that the thought amused her.

For some reason, I felt ill at ease. It wasn't just her beauty, or the fact that I couldn't understand why I should suddenly be so tongue-tied when a pretty girl made a pitch at me. It was something about the atmosphere in the bar. And then it came to me that the blonde and I were the only ones talking. Except for a young kid in a crew haircut sitting with a brunette girl at one of the tables, and a lanky, redheaded guy at the far end of the bar, we'd had the place to ourselves.

It was funny because, before Evelyn had come in, the young kid in

the crew cut and his girl had been having a pretty good argument about something, and the redheaded guy had been talking the ear off the bartender.

I glanced toward the kid and his girl, and then I did a double take. Both of them were glaring at us. The kid's eyes shuttled between the two of us, but his girl friend was concentrating entirely on the blonde. Neither of them could have been more than nineteen or twenty.

I held the kid's eyes a moment, but they didn't even blink. I shrugged and turned back to Evelyn. "Those two over at the table — are they friends of yours?"

She nodded. "Certainly. Just like Charley Boxer." She lowered her voice almost to a whisper. "And if you'll look up at the far end of the bar, you'll see another. I'm a very popular girl."

I lifted my drink and glanced over the rim of it at the redheaded guy. I've seen some hard looks in my time, and I know kill-fever in a man's eyes when I see it. I was looking straight at it.

The air in the Bamboo Room was so charged with hate that I began to think about the .38 clipped beneath my left shoulder.

"Did you say friends of yours?" I asked.

"I have lots of friends. And here comes one." Her smile was just as bright as ever. "Charley Boxer."

I looked past the redheaded man toward the street door, and sud-

denly I remembered that Charley had said he might meet me here for a drink. I'd been surprised at the change three years had made in Charley, and the change struck me again as he came toward the bar.

Three years ago Charley had been tall and blond and muscular, as happy-go-lucky as they come. Now he was still blond, but his shoulders seemed to have narrowed and settled into a defeated slump. He'd grown thin and hollow-cheeked. There was something different about his eyes, too — something I couldn't define.

"Hello, Charley," Evelyn said gaily.

Charley nodded at her, without smiling, and said nothing.

I grinned. "How about a drink, boy?"

He shook his head. "Not here," he said, his eyes still on Evelyn. "How about next door?"

I shrugged. "Whatever you say." I didn't know what the hell was going on in the Bamboo Room, but it was putting me in a pretty sour mood for a guy just starting a vacation. I put a bill on the bar and followed Charley out to the street.

"Come on over to the hotel," Charley said. "I'll give you a drink of rum that'll make that other stuff taste like turpentine."

We turned in the direction of the West Indian, and I said, "Give."

"What do you mean?"

"That girl back there. Evelyn. The way people react to her, you'd think she was a cobra. You can get

a hard look just by sitting next to her.

Charley mopped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "You just happened to meet her when her fan club was around."

"Meaning?"

"She's a girl who just naturally causes trouble. A guy takes one look at her, and straightway he forgets about everything else."

There was something about the way he said it. I looked at him, "you too, Charley?"

We'd walked another half dozen steps before he answered. Then, "Yeah . . . me, too."

"And the redheaded guy at the end of the bar?"

Charley nodded. "He's an artist. He came here for a couple weeks, to paint — and that was four months ago. Evelyn played with him a while."

We turned the corner, and I said, "Don't tell me that kid with the joe college haircut . . ."

"Yeah. He got it the worst of all. He and that little girl you saw him with were engaged — before Evelyn Lanier showed up. Nice kid, too, and you'd never find a nicer girl than the one you saw him with. Damn shame."

"Split them up, eh?"

"Yeah. Everybody thought Danny Jenkins and Lois were a sure bet to get married. But then along came Evelyn — and that was that. Danny never even knew what hit him."

"But Lois took him back, anyhow?"

"She'd *like* to. When Evelyn gave Danny the bounce, Lois was right there to catch him. She's crazy about Danny. They're both rich kids, and neither one of them ever wanted anything they didn't get."

We turned in at the West Indian and walked across the lobby to the elevator. We didn't say anything in the car on the way up to the fourth floor. I couldn't know what Charley was thinking about, but I was ready to bet it was about Evelyn Lanier, the same as I was. I hadn't talked to her long, but it had been long enough to believe that she'd be a hard girl to forget.

When we were settled in Charley's room with a pair of tall, cold drinks, Charley said, "It's funny, Mr. Drake. When I got the job as assistant manager here at the hotel, I sort of settled down. Maybe I was just getting old, but I began thinking about a wife and kids. I'd done enough helling around, and when Evelyn moved in here I guess I was just prime for what happened. Anyhow, I got it bad. She made the world go round for me, and for a couple months everything was great." He took a sip of his drink, and I noticed his eyes had narrowed a little.

"And then?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Then Red Cannon — that's the guy at the bar I was telling you about — came here from Miami. All at once he's number one boy. Then she meets Danny Jenkins, and Red gets the big good-bye." He smiled thinly. "And

now even Danny's joined the club."

I stared at my drink. "That Red Cannon — she must have really messed him up. He gave us one hell of a look."

Charley smiled thinly. "She did mess him up, believe me. He almost flipped. Red's not too well, you see — got all shot up in the service — head wound. Seems it left him deaf for about two years, and even after he got okay again his nerves were pretty well shot. He had a pension, so he took it easy. He isn't much of an artist, I guess, but he seemed happy enough." He laughed dryly. "Until he fell for Evelyn, that is."

"Who's number one man now, Charley?"

"You want to apply for the job?"

"Nope. Just curious."

"So far as I know, she's playing the field. She came down here originally to get a divorce, and this morning her settlement came through. Ten grand. I was passing her room and she called me in to tell me about it. I guess she just wanted to gloat, or something, but anyhow she showed me the money." His voice was edged with bitterness, now, I noticed. "She always was one to show everything she had. Maybe she got a bang out of needling me with the fact that she had money — when she knows I don't — and reminding me that she's going back to the States tonight."

I drained my glass and studied him. He wasn't kidding me. He was carrying a torch for her as big as a house.

"Funny about women like her," he said, almost as if he were talking to himself. "They like to rub it in. I told her she'd better put that ten grand in the hotel safe until she left, but she just laughed at me. She kept fanning it out before my face and asking me to look at it. 'Ten thousand dollars,' she'd say. 'I just got my check cashed. Couldn't we have a wonderful time on ten thousand dollars, Charley?' And then she'd laugh and riffle through the money again."

It was getting embarrassing. I hated to see an old friend as troubled as Charley obviously was, but there was nothing I could do for him. The only thing that would help Charley was time, and a lot of it.

I got up and moved to the door. "I'll see you later on, Charley," I told him. "Right now I'm going to get some shut-eye."

He nodded. "See you later."

I lay down on the bed in my room without bothering to take off my slacks and sport shirt. I meant only to rest a while and then go out to dinner. But I must have really been dead for sleep, because the next thing I knew, there was a loud knocking at my door and Charley's voice was calling my name.

I opened the door to let him in, but he shook his head and motioned for me to follow him. I went along the corridor behind him and he opened the door of the room next to mine and said, "In there."

I went in and Charley came in quickly behind me and shut the door.

She was curled up on the bed exactly as if she had lain down to take a nap. She was still wearing the blue halter and shorts and her face was still very beautiful. But now only the hair near her forehead was that pure butter yellow. The rest of it was red. On the floor beside the bed was a heavy bronze book-end, the mate to the one on the shelf at the head of her bed, and along one edge of the book-end there was a thick dark smudge with a few yellow hairs adhering to it.

Behind me, Charley Boxer's voice was toneless, almost inaudible. "I got to wondering why she didn't check out," he said. "I called her room, and when she didn't answer I came up."

I turned and looked at him. "You said she wasn't going to check out until tonight," I said slowly. I hated to think what I was thinking, but there was no way around it.

His eyes looked sick. "It *is* night," he said. "My God, it's damn near midnight!"

I must have been half asleep, because until that instant I hadn't realized that the large rectangle of the window was black and all the lights in the room were on. I glanced at my watch. It was eleven-forty.

Charley shook his head slowly. "I didn't kill her. I swear I didn't."

I studied him a long moment. "Have you called the police?"

He moistened his lips. "No."

"Why not?"

"Because they'll think the same thing you did. And they'll hear about my threatening her and —"

"Threatening her? When?"

"A couple of days ago. I lost my head, I guess. I thought maybe there was still some chance for me, and when I happened to meet her alone in the Bamboo Room I started talking about it." He ran his hand down across his sweat-sheened face and his whole body seemed to slump. "She laughed at me. Right in front of everybody. She laughed at me — and then I — I guess I threatened to kill her. I don't know just what I said. I was half crazy."

I walked over to the window and drew the blind, and then I made a quick circuit of the room. I didn't find anything, and I hadn't expected to find anything. I walked back to Charley.

"This is murder, Charley," I said. "I'm a private detective, not a homicide cop. You'll have to call the police."

"No!"

"Damn it, Charley! Get yourself together. Don't you realize that the longer you wait, the worse it's going to be?"

He reached out and caught my arms just above the elbows. His eyes were pleading with me. "I didn't do it," he said. "It was just like I told you it was. But nobody's going to believe me. Nobody!"

"But, Charley — what can I do?"

His voice sounded choked, as if he were having difficulty getting his breath. "You've got to find out who *did* do it," he said. "They won't believe I came up here for the reason I did. Once the police get in on this, I'm as good as convicted."

I tried to read his face. I could see the fear and the sickness there — but I couldn't see inside his brain. I couldn't know whether he was telling the truth.

"A little while longer won't make any difference," he said. "Just an hour, Steve. Just an hour."

I wanted to say no. Common sense told me to say no. But common sense wasn't strong enough. Not when there was a chance I might help one of the best friends I ever had — a guy who, three years before, had done everything he could to help me solve one of my toughest cases.

I pushed Charley down in a chair, facing away from the bed, and started pacing the floor.

"If you called her, you must have been at the desk," I said.

He nodded.

"Did you see anybody come in or out who might have had a reason to kill her?"

He thought a moment. "No."

"How about the people you were telling me about? Red Cannon, and Danny Jenkins, and Danny's girl — what's her name?"

"Lois. But she couldn't have done it."

"Like hell," I said. "Girls her age

have done worse than this. And she was crazy jealous over Danny, wasn't she?"

"Yes, but —"

"All right. So she could have. Does she or any of the others live here in the hotel?"

"Only Red Cannon."

"Do you think she told anybody else about the money? About the divorce settlement, I mean?"

He shook his head. "I think she just saw a chance to bait me, and took it. I don't think she'd be foolish enough to broadcast it."

"Probably not," I said. "And that means she must have been killed because somebody hated her. God knows there were enough of them. Red and Danny, and Lois . . ."

"Yeah," Charley said. "And me."

"And you, Charley. I'm doing this out of friendship, but I'm not blinding myself. You understand?"

He nodded.

"All right, then. Let's get the hell out of here."

I left him in his room and took the elevator down to the lobby.

I was within half a block of the Bamboo Room when I made out the tall, rangy form of Red Cannon coming toward me. The artist paused a moment to drop a letter in a mail box, and then came on again, and now I noticed that he was a little drunk. He glanced at me as we passed, but he said nothing and the sound of his steps never wavered.

The Bamboo Room was crowded when I stepped inside. I made a com-

plete check of the place, but there was no Danny Jenkins and no Lois. I went to the bar and ordered beer. When it came, I motioned the bartender close to me. He was not the same one who had been on duty during the afternoon when I had met Evelyn Lanier.

"You know Danny Jenkins, don't you?" I asked.

He nodded. "Sure."

"Have they been in here tonight?"

"Yeah. You just missed them. They ain't been gone more than fifteen minutes."

"How long were they here?"

"They were here when I came on duty. That was at six." He looked at me. "Why?"

"Did they leave, or did either one of them leave, say for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then come back?"

He shook his head. "Not that I saw. What's this all about?"

It had been a wild try, but that's all I had: wild tries. Wild tries, and an hour to do what I could for Charley Boxer.

"Sorry to bother you, friend," I said. "Thanks."

"Listen!" he said. "What the hell is up?"

But I wasn't interested in his questions.

I started back toward the West Indian Hotel. And all at once it hit me. I knew damn well who had killed Evelyn Lanier.

I asked the clerk at the desk for Mr. Cannon's room number, but I

didn't wait for the elevator. I had to knock for fully half a minute before the door opened.

"I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Cannon," I told him.

"Who are you?"

"My name's Drake."

"What the hell do you want?"

"Let's not be nasty," I said. "Do you invite me in, or do I just simply come in?"

He thought about that a moment, and I pushed him in.

He closed the door slowly and I could see those hot lights coming into his eyes, the same ones I'd seen in the bar. He was wearing a sport coat and slacks, and there was no bulge beneath his arm or on his hip. I had expected him to be heeled.

"All right," he said softly. "This better be good. If it isn't, I'm going to have some fun with your face."

"It's good," I said. "Real good. I know you killed Evelyn Lanier."

He looked at me, and for a long moment his eyes were absolutely empty of any expression whatever. No hot lights, no anything.

"Killed?" he said.

"Killed," I said. "Killed by you." I glanced around, and I saw what I had been almost certain I would see. On the dresser stood a pair of binoculars.

Still his face was utterly blank. "Evelyn's dead?"

"Very dead, Mr. Cannon. She threw you over, and you brooded about it, but you didn't do anything about it until tonight."

The hot lights were coming back. "I don't know what the hell you're trying to pull," he said.

"Just hold it," I told him. "You were sitting over here stewing in your own juices, and then you did what you probably do a lot. You took those binoculars off the dresser and looked over into Evelyn's room. It's a straight shoot across the court."

"Jesus," he whispered. "How crazy can you get?"

"You saw her show Charley Boxer some money. You heard her tell him exactly how much she had."

"You're just crazy enough to be amusing," he said. "Tell me, pal — how in hell could I *hear* her tell him *anything*? That room's eighty feet away."

"The point is, you understood because you can read lips. Charley told me you'd had a head wound in the war and that it left you deaf for a couple of years. That's long enough to learn to read lips."

Cannon moved two short steps toward me.

"Easy does it," I told him. "You hated her for what she'd done to you, and when you read her lips and knew she had ten thousand dollars in cash —" I shrugged — "well, it was just too much for you. You went over and got even with her, and got ten thousand dollars for your trouble besides."

He took another step toward me. "One thing, friend. One little thing. How the hell can you prove this?"

"There'll be people you've known in the past who'll swear to the fact that you can read lips," I said. "And those binoculars over there will — be focused exactly right."

"And you call that proof?"

"There's something else," I said. "You mailed a letter tonight. If I had ten thousand dollars of my own, I'd bet every dime of it that that letter contains *Evelyn's* ten thousand dollars. It's an old trick, mailing money to yourself in care of general delivery in some other town. They'll search that mail box, Cannon — and when they do, you're a cooked goose."

He was fast, but not fast enough. His left hand stabbed down beneath the pillow on his bed and came up with a snub-nosed revolver that was spitting bullets as fast as he could trigger. But I was a professional, and he was not. He kept pulling the trigger, but his gun was doing him no good, because my first slug had caught him squarely in the stomach and he was in no condition to do anything more than scream and fire blindly in my general direction.

I stepped in close and knocked the gun from his hand. Then he started to fall, and I caught him beneath the arms and eased him over on the bed. I'm no revenger, and I don't try to mete out justice. It hurt me to shoot a man in the belly, and I wished to hell I'd had another split second to aim and wing him instead.



Shakedown

BY ROY CARROLL

*Van was a mighty smart guy.
A little maneuvering, a little luck,
and he was into a soft, easy life.*



SHE was a cute kid and I hated to do this to her, but it had to be. I couldn't fool around. I gave it to her straight, told her I couldn't afford to get married, didn't want to get married and that I wasn't paying for any operation, either. Those things cost two — three hundred bucks, today. I didn't have that kind of money. I told her, too, that if she tried to put the pressure on me, I'd just take off, fast. I didn't have to hang around this town.

It was while she was putting on the big sob act that I figured an out for her. I told her to shut up for a minute and then I said: "Vera, listen. I think I've got it figured what you can do."

She cut off the tears fast, but her big, brown eyes stayed full and glittery as she looked at me. "What is it, Van?"

"It's simple," I told her. "You know the boss is nuts about you, don't you? Absolutely nuts. So when he hears you and I have busted up, he'll ask you for a date. You give it to him. And you keep on giving it to him. Not only the dates."

She sniffled and dabbed at her nose with a little wad of handkerchief. Those cowl-like eyes stared at me dumbly. She said: "Go out with Mr. Owen? I—I don't think I understand, Van."

"You don't understand." I went over to the dresser mirror and started combing my hair. I knew Vera was watching me, thinking what nice curly hair I had, and how handsome I was, and big, like a college football player. I knew that because she was always telling me. It got monotonous.

"What do you want me to do?" I said. "Draw you a blueprint? After a few dates the dumb old slob will want you to marry him. Okay, you marry him. Your troubles are over."

I turned away from the mirror and she was sitting very stiff in the chair, her usually round, pretty face looking drawn and shocked. "Van," she said. "Do you know what you're saying? I — I can't marry someone I don't even love. Especially a fat man old enough to be my father. Van, what do you think I am?"

I didn't tell her.

"Van, you can't be serious. I — What's the matter with you? What's got into you, lately?"

"Nothing's got into me," I told her. "You're the one in trouble. Remember? I'm telling you, that's your out. Your only out. It's simple. Easy."

She came flying out of the chair, squalling and sobbing again and flung herself at me. I held her for a minute. "Van," she said. "I thought you loved me. How can you do this to me? Van, I only want to marry *you*. I only love *you*."

For a minute I almost felt sorry for her. In spite of the fact that she was a good-looking kid, with a body that drove the guys in the office nuts, she was kind of shy and dumb. Maybe that was because she was all alone in the world, no folks or anything, lived by herself, didn't even seem to have any girl friends. I was the first guy she'd ever gone out with steady. I was the first guy, period. But what

good does it do you to feel sorry for someone? What does it buy?

"Look, Baby," I said, softly. "It won't be so bad. Harry Owen is stinking with dough. He's a nice old guy. You'll have the best of everything. And maybe after awhile, you and I can still get together."

She thought about that and the weeps died down again. Finally, she murmured: "Suppose he doesn't ask me to marry him, Van? What then?"

"He will," I said. "If he doesn't, you make him. You tell him he's got to because you're —"

She yanked away from me, and for a long minute she stared at me, a funny look in her eyes. "You're really serious, aren't you?" she said, finally. "You're really asking me to do a thing like that!"

Then she turned and ran out of my flat, still crying, slamming the door behind her. For a minute I was going to go after her, try to talk her into it. But then I realized I didn't have to. She had the idea, now. When she calmed down, she'd go through with it. What else was there for her to do? I knew she was scared stiff of any operation, even if she could get the dough.

The next day at the Owen Advertising Agency where Vera and I both worked in the mail room, she didn't even speak to me. She acted sullen and pouty, all day. Other people in the office started noticing right away and soon they were kidding both of us about it. They stopped, though, when Vera burst out crying and ran

out to the Ladies' Room. That was good. I knew now that Harry Owen wouldn't lose any time hearing about it.

The whole thing worked out smooth and fast after that. I called Vera in a couple of days and she told me she was dating him. She said it was being done on the QT, though, that Harry didn't want the rest of the employees to know about it. Then she said: "You know something, Van, the joke's on you. I'm already beginning to like Mr. Owen — Harry — a lot. He's not so old, after all, and he's not so fat, either. He's kind to me, too, Van. Can you understand what that means to me after going with you? He isn't cruel like you. He doesn't do the — the things you used to do. I think this was a very smart idea of yours, Van. I'm not having any trouble forgetting you, at all."

"Good for you," I said and slammed the receiver in her ear. I don't know what I got so damned sore about, but I did. Wasn't everything working out the way I'd planned? But it bothered me, somehow. I got mean drunk that night, the kind of drunk I don't like to get. The next day I was all right, though.

It was about a month or so later and I wasn't sure whether Vera was beginning to look a little chubby already or if it was just my imagination, when she called me one night, told me she had to see me. I tried to shake her off but she insisted. She came up to my place.

She looked terrible, her hair not fixed right, kind of ratty looking and her eyes too dark underneath and with a kind of haunted look. She sat there, twisting her hands in her lap and told me how she and Harry Owen had gotten real cozy together and he'd told her he loved her, wanted to put her up in a swanky apartment and like that. But he never even came close to asking her to marry him. Well, today, one of the other girls in the office made a funny remark to Vera and she knew she couldn't wait much longer. So tonight she gave Harry the business. She told him.

"Van, he went crazy," she said. "He told me I'd have to get it taken care of, I'd have to. He'd pay for everything. I told him that was out. I told him I wouldn't go for an operation, no matter what, and he couldn't make me, and that my — condition was his responsibility and he had to marry me. Well, he really went wild, then. He cursed me and, all of a sudden, he grabbed me, and started choking me. Look."

She undid a little silken scarf around her throat and showed me the imprint of his fingers. I didn't know what to say, couldn't figure it. Harry Owen was one of these Man Of Distinction types, gray temples, clipped mustache, a little paunchy, but always well groomed. Always quiet and polite, too. Every inch a gentleman. I couldn't even picture him doing something like that. Something was wrong, somewhere. I'd

never even heard him raise his voice in the office. I didn't get it.

"What am I going to do, Van?" Vera said. "I — I'm afraid of him, now. No kidding. Van, he wasn't fooling. His eyes were murderous. He would have killed me right then and there, but I managed to break away."

I said: "You go home and get some rest! Try to forget about it. Maybe he'll calm down and be sorry and change his mind after he thinks it all over. What else can you do? Forget this crap about being afraid of him. He was just trying to frighten you. Guys don't kill girls for things like this, today. What have you been reading, *American Tragedy* or something?"

I talked to her some more, calmed her down, and got her out of my place. But the thing kept bothering me, all that night. I didn't sleep much. I knew that these quiet, gentlemanly guys like Owen were the worst kind when they did finally flip about something. I wasn't really so sure Vera had nothing to worry about. But it wasn't my business any more. This was between the two of them.

The next day, I noticed that the boss was grouchy and irritable, the first time I'd ever seen him that way. He looked pale and drawn and about ten years older, too, as though he hadn't slept very well. But late in the afternoon, I met Vera by the water cooler. Nobody else was around. She broke out in a big smile.

"It's all right, Van," she whispered. "He apologized today. And he said he'd be glad to marry me. He said it was just that the shock of finding out about my — you know — condition, was too much for him. But he was sweet as pie, today. Tonight he's going to drive me up to show me his country place in Westchester. And next week we'll announce the wedding. Isn't that swell, Van?"

I said I guessed it was and then somebody came along and we couldn't talk any more. At five o'clock, going down in the elevator with Joe Harvey, the office manager, it came to me that something was wrong. A guy doesn't change just like that. Not from one complete extreme to the other. And this taking her up to see his country place sounded a sour note to me. Down in the lobby, I told Joe Harvey I had a big date tonight, and would he loan me his car? He said sure.

I drove right to the block where Vera had a room and parked there and waited and watched. About seven-thirty, Harry Owen's big Lincoln swerved to the curb in front of the building and he went in and got Vera and the two of them drove off. I followed them.

They drove up deep into Westchester before the Lincoln turned off into a lonely dirt side road. I cut the lights on Joe's car, eased in behind them, way behind, because Owen would have suspected something if he'd seen another car behind

him on this lonely country lane. Then I saw him stop, about a quarter of a mile ahead. I slewed into the side of the road, cut the engine, quick. I got out and started to walk, keeping in the shadows, toward the red glow of the Lincoln's taillight, up ahead.

I was about ten yards from their car when I saw Harry Owen get out of the driver's side, walk around the car to the other door, open it and start to drag something out. I edged a little closer. What he was dragging out, I saw, was Vera. He was dragging her out by the legs and her skirt got hiked way up and the starlight gleamed on the whiteness of her thighs. Then Owen went around to the trunk compartment of the car and got out a spade. He held the spade under his arm while he dragged Vera's corpse into the woods. I followed him and saw the clearing where he was going to bury her, and then I got out of there, fast. I drove home.

All that night I was so excited I could hardly sleep, hardly wait for tomorrow. I knew it would be better that way. Be more of a shock to him. When nothing had happened by morning, he'd pretty well figure he was safe. I waited most of the next day, too, until the middle of the afternoon. Then I took some mail into Harry Owen in his private office.

"Hi, Harry," I said. "How's Vera?"

He took it nice. He just looked up quietly and said: "Vera? Oh, you

mean that little brunette you used to go with?"

The one I used to go with. I had to admire this guy, the way he'd got control of himself, even though he did look terrible. I said: "Yeah, that one."

"She doesn't work here any more," he said, fussing with papers on his desk, not looking up. "I got a call this morning, said she was resigning, had another job."

"Yeah?" I said.

"Yes, Van. She was a nice girl. Too bad you two had a falling out. I'm busy, Van. Anything special on your mind?"

"Yes," I told him. "Vera. I'm wondering how she made that call this morning. Any phone booths up in those lonely Westchester woods? You know, where she's tucked in for the long sleep?"

He jerked almost out of his skin. His head went back so hard his neck snapped. I've never seen such a scared, sick look in anybody's eyes. His face looked like crumpled parchment. He didn't say anything. Just looked at me.

"She didn't quit any job, did she, Harry?" I said. "She just took a one way ride along a dirt road, off the Hutchinson River Parkway, with a guy who had her in some trouble."

"Van," he said. His voice sounded like a frightened child's. He tried to say something else but all he could do was keep saying my name over and over.

"Don't worry about it," I told

him. "I won't be greedy. But I think it's about time I got promoted, got a big raise, don't you, Harry?"

He said: "Go away, Van, for a few minutes. Leave me alone. Let me think."

"There's nothing to think about. I've been here long enough to get promoted, get more pay. Nobody will think anything. Not like what they would think if they knew about that grave up there in Westchester. I could take the cops there easy. I know just where it is."

"Wait a minute, Van," he said. Some of the color was coming back to his face. He loosened his collar. His eyes narrowed a little. "You're forgetting a few things. Vera and I were very — uh — circumspect. Nobody knows about our relationship. Not anybody at all. There's nothing to tie her in with me. I went back to her place, last night, and got rid of all her stuff, left a note written on her typewriter, explaining to the landlord that she'd gotten a better job in L. A. That angle's well covered. Van, the way it's set up, *you'd* be the one the police would jump on. Everybody in the office knew *you* were going with her, then had a fight when she got in trouble. It will just look like she let it go for a month, then really went after you. You got panicky — and took that way out. That's the way the police would figure it. So, you see, you've got no real hold on me."

I stared at him, unbelievably. That turned my guts over for a mo-

ment. But not for long. I laughed. "Nice try," I told him. "But police work is super-scientific these days. When they go over your car, they'll find proof that Vera was in it, last night. They'll go over that car with vacuum cleaners, with a fine tooth comb. There'll be plenty of evidence that you're the killer and you'll never in a million years get rid of it. The shoes you wore, the shovel. "I grinned at him. "A nice attempt to pass the buck, Harry, but it won't work. Let's talk about that raise some more."

I got to be Supervisor of the mailing department that day. With a big raise. And from then on I began living it up. I got a better apartment, a lot of clothes. My boss was a real good guy. Whenever I ran short I could always borrow a hundred from him. He wasn't in any sweat about me paying it back, either. Especially since I didn't overdo it. Poor Harry Owen wasn't enjoying life so much, though. He began to drink a lot. Even in the office, during the day, you could smell it on him. It started some talk but not much. So maybe business was bad or something and he was worried.

Once, I got curious, and asked him: "Why did you do it the hard way? Why didn't you marry the kid? She wasn't so bad."

He told me, then, that he was already married, although separated, and that his wife was against divorce. I borrowed an extra fifty from him, on that.

During that next month, I began to take it easy on the job, too. When I felt like taking an afternoon off or something, I did it. If I felt like sitting around, reading for awhile, I did it. Who was going to say anything? Harry Owen? It gripped a lot of people in the office. They got jealous. I didn't care. The hell with them! One wise guy even said:

"Who does this guy Van think he is, a privileged character or something? I never saw a guy get away with so much. He must know where the body's buried or something."

The funny part was, he wasn't kidding. He just didn't realize it, that's all.

This went on for a month. Then one morning, in front of the whole office, when I came in an hour late, Harry Owen told me: "Van, you come in late one more morning, take another afternoon off, or sluff on the job any more, and you're through. You're fired."

I looked at him as though he'd said something in Arabic. "What?" I said. "Are you kidding?"

He'd aged badly in the last month but right now his jaw was set firmly. His eyes looked sunken way into his head and bloodshot from drinking so much, but they held mine steadily enough. "Try it and find out," he said.

There was only one thing to figure. The guy'd gone crazy. He couldn't do that to me. For this, for humiliating me like that, I was really going to rub his nose in some dirt. Now he

was really going to pay. I'd get ten grand out of him, or else. From now on I'd bleed him dry. But it was late afternoon before I got into his office to see him. By then he was pretty drunk. A kind of controlled drunk, so that he could still talk all right, and sit fairly straight in his chair. But he was loaded, no question, in spite of that.

He didn't even give me a chance. "Whatever you're going to say, skip it," he told me right off. "The honeymoon is over, Van. You have no more hold on me."

I got so mad I felt as though I was swelling, like a puff adder. My collar got too tight. "I haven't, huh?" I said.

"No, Van." He showed his teeth in a ghastly grin. "I moved it. It isn't where you saw me put it, any more. I put it where nobody'll ever find it. Never. So now what can you prove?"

It took me a moment to get it through my head. I said: "I can still go to the cops."

"Sure," he said. "And they'll go up there and find nothing, and slap you around for bothering them."

"Wait a minute. You couldn't have moved her. She's been there a month. She'd have been a mess."

He looked for a moment as though he was going to throw up. Then he got control, and said: "She was. Don't let's talk about it any more, Van. It's all over."

"You're bluffing!" I shouted it at him. "What do you think I am, a

chump? There wouldn't be enough left of her to move."

"Okay," he said. "Have it your way. Now get out, before I call someone to throw you out."

I went back to the mail room but I kept thinking about it and the more I thought the more I knew he wasn't bluffing. Yet he *couldn't* have done what he said. I had to find out. I borrowed Joe's car again that night and drove up there. Along that same dark, dirt road, to the same spot. It gave me the creeps a little. I hadn't brought a flashlight and in the dark it took me a little time to find the clearing. But I found it. The only thing was, he was right; he hadn't been bluffing. The shallow grave was still there but it was all dug up. It was empty. She was gone.

"I'll be damned," I said, out loud.

"Yeah," someone said, and I whirled around to stare into the blinding beam of three flashlights. Three flashlights held by cops.

They took me back into the city and I told the cops the whole story. I had to. They thought I'd killed Vera, buried her out there, just as Harry Owen had first said that they would. They'd gotten an anonymous phone tip about the corpse and where it was buried, earlier in the day. They'd gone out and dug it up. The same tip told them to watch me.

I told them, of course, that their phone tip had been Harry Owen.

They said they questioned him, after that, investigated him. He denied knowing anything about any of it. Apparently, as he had said, they weren't able to dig up any connection between him and Vera. They couldn't find anybody who'd ever seen them together, or knew they were seeing each other. They'd been circumspect, all right. He was clean. I wasn't, as far as the cops were concerned.

I knew what had happened. I'd pushed him too far. He'd finally decided to take a chance on winding the whole thing up, getting rid of me, by putting the cops on me. It hadn't been much of a chance. He'd realized that the police couldn't see anybody but me. It was cut and dried. They wouldn't investigate him, too much, Harry Owen figured. And he was right.

I couldn't talk the cops out of it and my lawyer couldn't convince the jury, either. After the trial he told me that he'd heard Harry Owen was drinking himself to death, had wound up in the Alky ward a couple of times, already. A lot of good that did me.

The stupid part about the whole thing, the Police lab worked on the remains. And like I'd heard it happens sometimes, Vera may have had all the symptoms, but according to those lab boys, it must have been something else, because they said she wasn't that way at all.



The G-Notes

A NOVELETTE

BY ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT

*How far can you get with a bullet in
your chest and two thousand dollar bills?*



WHEN Joe Carlin was tired, the jagged scar along the left side of his jaw turned red. Now, as he stood staring down at Paul Velco, the scar was like a heavy scarlet thread stitched on his white skin.

"Don't hurry any on my account, Velco," he said quietly. "I got nothing better to do. Enjoy yourself."

Velco plucked a grape from the cluster of Concord on the silver dish and stuffed it into a mouth that was already filled with bread and cheese. He took a long gurgling drink of wine from a tall glass, wiped his mouth, belched, and leaned back on the sofa and looked at Carlin as though Carlin were not really there at all. "I wouldn't even give you a piece of fruit," Velco said, in a voice that was thick with distaste. "I wouldn't even ask you to take a chair."

"You can keep your fruit," Carlin said. "You can keep your fruit and your chair."

Velco picked up a linen napkin that lay on the coffee table alongside the silver dishes of bread and fruit and cheese. He wiped his neck where the pink flesh hung in sweaty folds over the collar of his silk dressing gown and spat grape seeds into

the fireplace. "I oughtn't to pay you nothing," he said. "I ought to throw you right out on your can. You think I should pay you, go ahead and convince me. Make it good. Make me believe it."

"I did the job," Carlin said in his hoarse low voice. Carlin was a small man with powerful sloping shoulders and heavy hands. His sullen, handsome face was as pale and hard-looking as bleached bone. His eyes were a shade of gray-blue that was almost white, the color of dirty ice under dark brows, and his hair was Indian black.

Velco's heavy lips sneered over the rim of his glass. "You did a job!" he said savagely. "You went after the woman's stuff, and there was nobody there but her, and all you had to do was tie her up and walk out with the loot, as easy as that. So what did you do, you cheap punk?"

"You know what I done," Carlin said tonelessly. "You know what I done — so why chew me about it any more?"

"You don't give me any reason," Velco said. "A guy should have a reason for a nutty caper like that."

"I had a reason," Carlin said. "You ever pull any time, Velco?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Velco asked, and his eyes came up quickly from the glass and stared at Carlin's face. His eyes, under their heavy lids, were like polished jet. "What the hell kind of bug question is that to ask? You must be stir simple, asking me a question like that."

"I was trying to tell you why I messed around with the broad," Carlin said. "I'd been out of Auburn exactly six days when I pulled that job. You ever see this Eve LaMotte, this babe I took for the stuff?"

"I've seen her," Velco said. "I've met her. I owned a piece of a show she was in once. I'm even a kind of an acquaintance of the guy that's keeping her now."

"Okay," Carlin said. "Then you know what she's like. A babe like you think about all day and dream about all night, when you're doing time. Like I said, I'd been out of Auburn six days, after doing three years. I walked into her apartment and there she was and I guess I went a little crazy."

"A little crazy," Velco said scornfully. "A little crazy! That girl, that beautiful girl, only got out of the hospital yesterday, and it's four weeks since you snatched the stuff."

Carlin lifted his thick shoulders in a shrug, and a faint reminiscent smile twisted his hard mouth. "She didn't want to play," he said softly. "She had on a negligee a guy could push through a keyhole with his thumb, and she must have taken a bath in perfume. I shoved her in the

bathroom and when I told her I wanted more than the jewelry, she started to yell. So I clipped her. What else was there for me to do?"

Velco stood up, a big man, thick of waist and chest, with a belly that sagged over his fat thighs. "And your handkerchief came off while you were playing," he said, moving towards the desk in the corner of the room. "The handkerchief you used for a mask fell off and Miss LaMotte got a good long look at your stupid puss. Guess what, punk?"

Carlin pulled a loose cigarette from the breast pocket of his shabby coat, lit it with steady hands. "Maybe you better tell me, Mr. Velco," he said, his voice almost a whisper. "I never was good at guessing things. I never liked guessing games, either."

"A smart piece of goods too, aren't you?" Velco said. "A fresh punk as well as a creep. All right, Carlin, listen! This afternoon, LaMotte went down to police headquarters. She looked at the mugg books and identified your picture without half trying."

Carlin let smoke dribble through his nose, and a muscle moved in his flat cheek over the red line of the scar. "I must be a pretty hot article by now," he said, and the faint smile tugged at his lips again.

"Hot!" Velco said. "Like a home-made machine gun, you're hot, Carlin. Your picture'll be in every paper in town tomorrow. It'll be in the *News* that's on the street now."

Carlin spat a shred of tobacco off

his tongue and took another deep drag on his cigarette.

"I should've known you'd queer it," Velco said. "I planned that heist so good I didn't think even a moron could louse it up. I told you everything you had to know to pull it clean. I did everything but write out instructions."

"Sure," Carlin said. "My part was easy. You had the dirty end of it. You had to fence the stuff. You had to carry all that heavy jewelry clear across town in your Cadillac. Tough."

Velco pulled open a drawer of the massive desk, reached inside and brought his hand out with an envelope pinched between thumb and forefinger. "I'm going to pay you, Carlin," he said, and his wide mouth smiled. "I got a reputation for being a square guy, a reputation I built up for years. When I say I'll pay, I'll pay. Even to a five-and-dime chiseler like you. Your cut in the deal is two thousand bucks."

Carlin's lips twitched into a grin that was as mirthless as the smile on Velco's face. "You said the stuff was worth a hundred and thirty grand. But I guess it was tough to fence, huh, Velco? And besides, what with all the heat I stirred up, I'm in a bad spot to argue, huh?"

"Listen to me," Velco said. "I'll tell you things you don't know, five-and-dime. I could even pick up the phone and call the cops and turn you over. And suppose you told the law I was the top man in this deal? I'll tell you what would happen, crumb.

With the connections I got, the legitimate businesses I got, there isn't a cop in town would believe you. There isn't a cop, or a judge, or a jury would believe a man like me would as much as spit on a cheap hoodlum like you, not even for practice."

The muscle moved again in Carlin's cheek and his pale eyes darkened as though some muddy fluid had boiled up suddenly in their icy depths. But Carlin made no hostile move. He spread his hands out in a wide gesture of resignation, and sighed.

"Okay, Mr. Velco," he said. "You're the big wheel, the high shot, the guy with the weight. Me, I'm just a punk like you said. So pay me off, if you don't mind. Pay me off and let me go."

Velco slid a thumb under the flap of the envelope, his belly shaking with silent laughter. "I said I'd pay," he told Carlin. "I said I'd pay, like I always pay. But did I say how? Did I say how?" From the envelope he took two new one-thousand-dollar bills and fanned them out upon the flat top of the desk.

Carlin stared at the money with his mouth open in astonishment, and Velco's laughter rose to a rumbling roar that echoed through the room.

"And just how are you going to cash these, punk?" Velco asked. "Just where and how would a petty larceny bum-like you bust a grand? Especially a guy with no connections in this town. Especially a guy

that's very hot in every inch of it."

Carlin swept up the two thousand-dollar bills quickly and put them into a hip pocket, his face impassive, his eyelids lowered like white curtains over the dark fury of his eyes.

"So now, start marching, you punk," Velco said. "Crawl out of town! And while you're crawling, think about what it means to put your dirty hands on a girl like Eve LaMotte."

"So that's it," Carlin said. "You're just sore because you'd have liked to do the same. Only you haven't got the guts."

Velco slapped Carlin, hard.

Carlin was quick with his knife, whipping it out of the pocket in which he had tucked the money. But Velco was just as quick with his gun. The .38 came out of a pocket in the dressing gown, gripped in a big fist. Velco fired as the spring-blade of Carlin's knife snicked out of the handle like a darting tongue and came up in a flashing arc that did not reach its mark.

The bullet tore into the muscles of Carlin's chest where they curved out below his left armpit. It ripped through sinews and flesh and smashed into the bones of his upper arm. Carlin felt as if a sledge hammer had smashed his shoulder with one frightful, shuddering jolt of pain that turned half of his upper body to sheer ice.

Carlin reeled back, spun half way around, and the knife fell from his

hand. He felt sudden illness claw at the pit of his stomach, and nausea rolled over him in a blinding yellow-green wave that had a hard core of sound — the sound of Paul Velco's voice shouting through the fog in which Carlin reeled, waiting for a second bullet to cut him down.

"If you don't want one in the head, get out!" Velco said. "*Get going before I change my mind.*"

There was a door at the end of the room, and Carlin found himself going through it as though by blind instinct, choking back the sour stuff that rose in his throat. Beyond the door, a banister curved sharply into a stair well that was like a deep pool of shadow, and Carlin flung himself toward it, going down with reckless speed, stumbling, falling, rising to reach a frantic hand for the street door of the house.

Outside, the rain fell and Carlin went down the street that was wet and dark and gleaming with misty lamplight, and the wind blew cool against his cheeks. He went at a staggering run, heedless of where he was going so long as his legs carried him away from the house. The rain soaked through his clothes and into his wound, and Carlin felt the first searing, stabbing pain of his torn flesh and bones as numbness gave way to agony.

II

Twenty minutes later, Joe Carlin pushed the ball of his thumb hard against the button beneath the grimy

white card that read *Arnold Burkman, Attorney at Law*, and kept it there until he heard footsteps behind the door. After a while, a voice said, "Who is it?"

Carlin put his lips close to the scummed varnish. "Open up, Burkman."

The door opened a few inches. Carlin got his good shoulder against it and pushed his way inside. He closed the door quickly and stared at Arnold Burkman.

"God!" Burkman said. "So it's you." He was a tall man in dirty underwear, a gaunt man with matted, grizzled hair, and a face that was all lumps and creases and sagging hollows, like a wax mask that had been exposed to the sun.

"Yeah," Carlin said. "I got a slug in me. I need a doctor bad."

Burkman's washed-out eyes, red-rimmed and filled with sleep, fixed themselves on Carlin in a wavering stare. His eyes moved to the great stain spreading on Carlin's coat, and then down to the drops of blood dripping on the floor.

"So you copped one," the lawyer said. "And you probably left a trail of blood into the house and all the way up the stairs. Jeez, my landlady'll blow her stack."

"To hell with the landlady," Carlin said, holding his right hand inside his coat.

"You shouldn't have come here," Burkman said. "You know damn well you shouldn't have come here."

"I got to have a doctor. You're a

criminal lawyer, rumpot. You must know a croaker who'll fix me up. You got a lot of connections in this town."

Burkman shivered, hugging himself with long skinny arms. "Croakers cost money. No ethical doctor would touch you with a fork."

"So get me one that ain't ethical. I'll pay him whatever he's got to have."

"And what about me?" Burkman asked, looking away from Carlin's face, frowning at the blood stains on the floor. "It's nothing for nothing in this world and damn little for a dollar. I'd be taking a big risk helping you, Joey. I'll have to see a hundred bucks in it for myself."

"I'll pay," Carlin said.

"There's a guy I know up in Spanish Harlem," Burkman said. "Got no license because he did a jolt for some abortions, but he's good. He could patch up a hole made by a cannon. But he'll want at least a C-note for himself, too."

"He'll get it," Carlin said. His rising voice had anguish in it. "God-damn it, shyster, get the lead out. Get moving!"

Burkman reached a skinny hand inside the dirty undershirt and deliberately scratched his chest. "I'll want my dough first, Carlin," he said amiably. "Like all good hustlers, I get my money first. My hundred bucks now, before I take you to the doctor."

Carlin took a quick sliding step towards the lawyer and glared up at

him, his face shining with sweat. "You get paid at the doctor's, see? You both get paid off when I get fixed up."

"How do I know you got any money?" Burkman asked. "You've been living hand-to-mouth, waiting for the payoff on that job you pulled. How do I know you got two hundred?"

Carlin withdrew his right hand from inside of his coat. A spasm of pain rippled across his face, like a flash of lightning in an empty sky, and the scar was a line of flame across his set jaw. He wiped his bloody hand carefully on a trouser leg, reached into his hip pocket, pinched out one of the thousand-dollar bills and held it close to Burkman's face.

The lawyer stared, his big mouth gaping. "Jesus!" he said. "A grand! You know if it's good, kid? You sure it isn't queer?"

"Paul Velco gave it to me. His idea of a joke because he figured I'd have trouble getting it busted. Velco don't shove queer money."

"Velco, huh?" Burkman said softly. "So I guess you couldn't pass it, could you, boy — not in the shape you're in? But I could pass it, couldn't I? There's lots of places will cash a G-note, no questions asked, if you give them a hundred for their trouble."

"We'll give 'em the hundred," Carlin said. He pointed with his chin at a raincoat that hung on a peg on the back of the door. "I'll need your raincoat, Burkman. Tie the end of

the left sleeve together, see, and the sleeve will stop the blood from drippin' out. No hackie'll haul me if I'm bleeding all over his cab like a stuck pig."

"I hope you got cab fare," Burkman said, "because I'm absolutely Tap-City myself. I haven't got a crying dime."

"I got just four lousy bucks in the world," Carlin said, "outside of this one G-note."

Burkman shrugged and walked to a cluttered table pushed back against one wall. He lifted a nearly empty whiskey bottle and pressed the neck against his lips. Carlin crossed the room in three long strides and snatched the bottle from Burkman's hand. "The shot that's left in here goes to me," he said. "You can tie the bag on tighter after we bust the grand. But I'm the guy that's belting this one, because this is one I really need."

III

The woman who opened the door of the apartment had skin the color of cinnamon and a slim, upthrust figure like a young girl's. She stood with the door open a few inches, fumbling with a shoulder strap of her soiled satin slip, her black sloe eyes squinting into the shadows of the hall.

"You remember me, Rosa," Burkman said. "Get the hell out of the way and let us in."

The woman giggled, and stood back, and Carlin followed Burkman

down a dimly lighted hall. The lawyer opened a door and led the way into a dark and malodorous kitchen in which a fat little man sat at a littered table, hunched over a Racing Form.

"Greetings, Gradek," Burkman said. "And how's the good gray doctor?"

The fat little man had a bald, domed head that was too big for his dwarfed body. His face was round and childlike. He looked at Burkman with bleak dark eyes, and spat on the kitchen floor. "Mr. Burkman," he said bitterly. "The legal lush. The saturated shyster."

"Now that we've admired each other," Burkman said, "meet my friend, Joe. He's had a piece of bad luck. He was looking at an old gun he's got in the house, a family heirloom, see, and it went off and punctured him a little. A mere trifle, a flesh wound, Gradek, but bothersome."

"Any wound I look at is serious," Gradek said. "Any wound I look at could be dangerous — for me. I hope your boy friend remembered to bring his bankroll with him when he came."

"Look," Burkman said, and the levity was gone from his voice. "We've done business, you and I, and you know I can't afford to cheat you. The boy's got a G-note, see, a thousand-dollar bill. A good one. It's all he's got."

"I never saw a thousand-dollar bill," Gradek said. "I imagine they're

beautiful to look at." His thin, precise voice sank to a sardonic growl. "So how do I get paid out of a thousand-dollar bill? Who cashes one at eleven o'clock at night?"

"I know a loan shark who'll break it," Burkman answered. "He'd cash it at five o'clock in the morning in a graveyard. Patch this boy up. Give him a shot of something that'll keep him on his feet. When you've done that, we'll go out, the three of us, and we'll break the bill. You know I'm not going to stiff you, Gradek. Hell, there's no telling when I might even need you myself."

The fat little man stood up quickly. "I can tell right from here that the wound is quite serious," he said. "I could always make a good fast diagnosis even from quite a way off. So my price, of course, is a little more now. Say a hundred and fifty instead of one hundred dollars."

Carlin followed Gradek into a bathroom that adjoined the kitchen. The pain was like a knife in him now, a dull knife that twisted and slashed and turned into red-hot pincers whenever he moved.

"If you'll step into the bathtub, please," Gradek said, "it'll be so much easier to clean up the mess."

Carlin looked down and saw the tub, cracked and stained with rings of human grime, a shallow pit yawning beneath his wavering eyes. He kicked off his shoes and climbed into the tub, lifting his legs high, feeling the cold, slippery enamel beneath him. He stood very still, sweat run-

ning down his face, as Gradek stripped off the raincoat and blood-soaked jacket and shirt beneath.

"It's not so bad," Gradek said, looking at the crimson horror of Carlin's chest and arm. "But it's bad enough so that you won't feel like hugging your girl friend for a while. You'll need plasma, and morphine, and other things, of course. So, naturally, my price comes up a little. One hundred and seventy-five now instead of the hundred and fifty I quoted."

Carlin did not answer. He stood looking over Gradek's shoulder, watching a fat cockroach crawl between two waterpipes that rose like black fingers against the discolored wall. Arty Keller, the old con who had shared his cell at Auburn, had told him that it helped to stare at something, very hard, when you were in great pain. You looked at something hard, and you thought of things, and if you were lucky you wouldn't scream, because concentration turned the edge of pain.

Carlin stood still, his eyes fixed on the fat roach, thinking of Paul Velco's florid face, his soft smiling mouth, of the boss mobster's big belly shaking with silent laughter as he put the two thousand-dollar bills down upon the desk. He felt the sting of the needle as it bit into his flesh.

Alongside him, Burkman asked Gradek if there was a drink in the house. When the medic said no, he asked: "The alcohol in this bottle,

Doc . . . Is it drinking or rubbing stuff? And what would it do if I took a shot of it? God, I've got the grandfather of all hangovers."

"The Bowery stiffs drink it," Gradek said. "A lot of guys guzzle it, and some of them live."

Carlin watched Burkman slosh three fingers of raw alcohol into a dirty glass, dilute it with warm tap water, and swallow the mixture when the alcohol had turned to the color of thick smoke. And then, suddenly, his vision began to blur and the pain grew in him and several times he almost blacked out but managed to hold on. He didn't dare black out.

IV

It was long past midnight and they were on their way to find the man who Burkman had said would break the thousand-dollar bill. Carlin moved like a sleepwalker, guided by Gradek's hand upon his arm: dazed but his mind still on the G-note, now in Burkman's pocket. The doctor's needle had stopped Carlin's pain temporarily, but the effects of the drug lay heavily upon him, and he was glad when Gradek came to a sudden halt. They were on an empty street that ran between warehouses and tenements and there was no glimmer of light in the buildings that rose black as cliff walls toward the dark sky. It had stopped raining, but a cold wind blew strong from the east, and along the gutters, dirty, sodden scraps of paper raced like

tumbleweeds before the force of a gale.

"How much farther?" Gradek asked. "Jeez, Burkman, you think I've got legs like a kid? Why didn't we stay in the cab, instead of getting out way back up the street?"

"You spend too much time with Rosa," Burkman said. He stopped suddenly, and there was a long silence. Then he said, "But I guess we've come far enough, at that. So now you can get lost, pill roller. Beat it, before I kick your teeth in."

"Wait a minute," Gradek said, his face contorted. "You can't get away with this. You stiff me, shyster, and I'll get even if it's the last thing I ever do. You still have to live in this town. I got friends here, don't forget."

"Nobody has any friends," Burkman said in a calm and weary voice, and clubbed a short jolting blow into Gradek's belly. The little man bent almost double, and the lawyer jerked up a knee and drove it into Gradek's face.

The fat little man went to his hands and knees and was very sick. Burkman looked down at him with an almost impersonal stare. "You squeal on me, Gradek," he said, "and then I squeal on you. So we both go to jail, and there's no percentage in that for either of us. The way it is, you got no money, but you're still free to use your tools. You've got your knives, your needles, and you still got Rosa."

Burkman turned and, without an-

other look at Gradek, walked off into the darkness.

Carlin leaned against the wall, peering down at the man who knelt at the curb. Gradek raised a face that was chalk white. He twisted his bloodied mouth into a grimace that looked like the grin of an idiot. "Go after him, you fool!" he said. "You half-witted slob! Don't you know he's going to gyp you, too?"

Carlin found Burkman standing under a street lamp, looking up and down the street for a cab. "I didn't think I'd have to tell you, Joe," he said. "But I just cut you out of this deal, too. You got off the gravy train, back there, where Gradek fell on his face."

"I'll kill you," Carlin said, his voice thick from the drug. "You cheat me, I'll kill you someday, no matter how long I have to wait."

"Count yourself out, Joey," Burkman said. "You haven't got your shiv, you haven't got a gun, and you're so weak you couldn't knock a sick fly off a saucer of milk. So count yourself out."

Carlin said, hoarsely, "You filthy louse!"

Burkman laughed. "Before I passed out last night," he said, "I saw the early edition of the *News*, with your mug splashed all over half the second page. You haven't got a prayer, kid."

"Bust the grand," Carlin said. "Give me a break, Burkman. One little break. Bust the grand and keep it all, except enough to get me across Jersey, to a place just over

the Pennsy line. Give me a break?

"What's for you in Pennsy?" Burkman asked. "They got cops there, too, Joey. They'll scrag you wherever you go, boy."

"Give me a break, Burkman," Carlin said. "I got a cousin with a farm in Pennsylvania, a place I can hole up in until I'm well."

"Sorry, kid," the tall man said, and his voice faded as he walked away fast. "But I'm checking out of this town for a while and I figure I'll need every cent I've got. Going to try my luck somewhere else. California maybe."

Carlin's quivering legs would not carry him after Burkman. He stood still, cursing him. It was then that the two winos came out of the doorway near the corner.

He smelled the men even before he saw them, the rank sweat and alcoholic reek of unwashed flesh, the sour odor of clothes that stank from months of wearing. He turned as they came at him from the black cave that was the doorway.

One of the men was a burly giant with an empty bottle gripped in his hand. A new fear stirred in Carlin as the wino towered over him.

"Hey, Mac," the man said, his teeth chattering with cold. "How about slipping us half a buck?"

The other wino came at Carlin from his injured side and his voice was a harsh command. "A crummy four bits, mister? Or maybe we should take it out of your hide?"

"There's the guy with the dough,"

Carlin said. He pointed at Burkman's retreating back. "I ain't holding anything, boys. Not a lousy dime. But that guy there is crawling with dough. That guy there is packing a thousand bucks."

The two winos looked at him a moment, and then at one another, and then they turned and ran off toward Burkman. A moment before they reached him, Burkman turned and raised his fists, and the bottle which the big wino was carrying struck Burkman on the forehead with a splintering crash.

The lawyer screamed and fell on his back, and the smaller of the two winos brought one of his feet crashing down on Burkman's face. The lawyer raised himself on one hip and flung his arms over his head. The big wino still held the neck of the bottle in his hand and the cruel and jagged fragment of the bottle remained like a broken-rimmed goblet in his fist. He drove the broken glass into Burkman's face and then stepped back, whooping with drunken, maniacal laughter, and the smaller drunk staggered at the fallen man and kicked him again and again. Carlin stood watching from the shadows as Burkman's sagging features lost all shape and identity, like red clay on a potter's wheel.

Carlin stepped back into a doorway and watched the winos go through Burkman's pockets until they found the thousand-dollar bill. He watched them both grab it at the same time and saw that neither one

was going to give it up. Each of them held onto part of the bill, and with their free hands they started slamming at each other's face, clawing and tearing at each other. The sight and the feel of that money in their hands seemed to drive them to fury. Carlin watched the G-note as it was snatched from hand to hand, and torn apart. He saw the torn and crumpled tiny pieces of it flutter down to the muck and mud of the street, and move away in the heavy wind.

Carlin left them still fighting and walked to the corner, turned into a side street and staggered on, moving into the teeth of the wind. When he could walk no farther he stepped into the door of a vacant building and sat on the cold floor with the collar of Burkman's raincoat pulled up around his face. He fell asleep almost instantly.

When he awoke, stiff with cold, with the knife of pain twisting again in his chest and arm, he saw that the darkness beyond the doorway was growing thin, washed to the color of dirty wool by the faint and indefinite light of the moment before dawn.

V

Rosa ushered Carlin into Gradek's bedroom and slipped away without saying a word or making a sound.

Gradek lay under a torn crazy quilt, on a tarnished brass bed. His swollen lips were the color of grapes. He did not seem surprised to see Carlin again.

"I thought maybe you'd be around," Gradek said. "It isn't as though you had so much choice, is it, Joe? To a boy in your position, I'm like the Johns Hopkins and the Mayo Brothers rolled into one. You could say I had a sort of medical monopoly, in a way of speaking." His fingers came up to touch his mouth. "I could use the Mayo Brothers, myself. I damn near never got home after the way that bastard kneed me. But I'll get him for that. If I have to —"

"Forget it," Carlin said, tiredly. "Burkman already got his. But good." He told Gradek about Burkman and the winos. When he finished, he leaned against a crumbling wall that was half covered with photographs of nude girls, and wiped sweat from his grimy face. "I came to make a deal," he said. "I want to make a deal, Gradek." He sucked air into lungs that seemed filled with hot sand, and started to speak again.

Gradek waited, cocking a polite but skeptical eyebrow, but Carlin could not get the words past his lips. He fell forward in a long, sliding fall, and lay face downward beside the bed.

When Carlin recovered consciousness, he was lying upon the bed, stripped of everything except his bandages, and Gradek was standing beside him with a hypodermic syringe in his hand. He was wearing a long-tailed cotton shirt that flapped about his knees, and a cigar butt smoldered in the corner of his mouth.

"You passed out, Joey. Exhaustion, pain, loss of blood. Rosa and I thought we'd be doing you a kindness by undressing you and putting you to bed. And incidentally, Joey, we found your second thousand-dollar bill."

"Okay," Carlin said, "so you found it." He was too tired to care very much, either way.

"You must understand that you're in pretty bad condition," Gradek said. "There's a bullet in you, Joey, lodged pretty deep, and it should be removed. There were several reasons why I couldn't remove it, last night. I didn't have enough morphine on hand to really knock you out, for one thing. And if I had, you would have been too sick to go after the money. You understand, don't you?"

Carlin said nothing, and Gradek's amiable voice went on. "So, what could I do, except sew you up with the slug in you? A pretty unethical procedure, I'll admit, but you can't eat ethics or wear them, or sleep with them, either."

He sat down on a chair and stared thoughtfully at the floor. "I could take the slug out of you today, Joey, but after that, what? You're a sick boy. You need some place to stay until you get well. Also, you're hot. You're hotter than young love in a haymow in August."

Carlin cursed him feebly.

"Of course I could just turn you out when I'd patched you up," Gradek said. "But you'd only fall down in the street, and then the cops

might pick you up, and you'd probably tell them about me. On the other hand, I can't keep you here. It's occurred to me that maybe you have some place you can go. If you've got any such place in mind, tell me, and perhaps I'll help you to get there."

Hope stirred in Carlin. "There's a farm in Pennsylvania," he murmured. "Just across the Jersey line. If I could get there, I'd be all right."

Gradek lifted the long-tailed shirt and scratched one of his fat thighs. "Pennsylvania is a long way," he said. "I hadn't thought of going that far. But I suppose, since you're a reasonable fellow, and can't expect to get that thousand dollars back, I might consider it. I can borrow a friend's car — for a price, of course."

"That's wonderful of you," Carlin said bitterly. "That's the biggest-hearted offer I ever heard."

Gradek rose from his chair. "I'll dig the lead out of you at the farm, son. It won't kill you to pack it a few hours more. I could dig it out of you here, of course, but you'd be weaker, and it'd be a mess, and Rosa doesn't like me cutting people in here." He shook the hypodermic syringe, and smiled. "I'll just sink this spear into you, Joey, and you'll get some rest. Along towards dark, we'll shove off for Pennsy."

Carlin scarcely felt the needle. It was a pin-prick of minute pain, dissolving almost instantly into a feeling of drowsy pleasure as a warm pink mist closed in about him. . . .

VI

Carlin awoke to find Gradek gently shaking him, and beyond the window the light was blue with autumnal dusk. Gradek was neatly dressed in a shabby tweed suit and a white shirt and polka dot tie. He had a cup in his hand, and he held it to Carlin's lips.

"Drink this, Joey," Gradek said. "It'll help pull you out of the fog. You really were sleeping. I dressed your wounds while you slept, and my Rosa gave you a nice sponge bath. Boy, you needed that bath. You know what Rosa said? She said, 'Ayee! but thees one steenks!'"

Carlin swallowed some of the bitter fluid, retched, and then emptied the cup as Gradek pressed it relentlessly against his lips.

"I've got some clothes for you," the doctor said. "Not new, but clean. The car's outside, and we can leave as soon as you're dressed. But I'll have to make one stop, in Manhattan, to break the thousand-dollar bill."

"Okay," Carlin said. "Okay, Gradek."

"On second thought," Gradek said, "I'd better stop at a post office too. So that I can mail the money to myself. Just in case you should get any bright ideas, Joey, after I've hauled you to Pennsylvania. Just in case you should turn out to be ungrateful for what I've done."

He set the cup down on the floor, picked up a pair of faded khaki trou-

sers from a small pile of clothing on the bed, and began to draw the trousers on over Carlin's legs. "Sorry there's no underwear," Gradek said. "I couldn't seem to find a pair of shorts that were clean."

He pulled the trousers up around Carlin's hips, then said: "I gave a lot of thought to the matter of where I was going to break the grand note. I was getting discouraged, and then I happened to think of the Plume Club. You know the Plume Club, Joey? No? Well, perhaps it's a little too refined for your type of character. But, for your information, the Plume Club is a private drinking club, in the sixties.

"Only it's something more than just a private guzzling joint," Gradek went on as he picked up a torn cotton sock. "What it really is, Joey, is a very high-class brothel. One of the finest in the world. At the Plume Club, you can get a good dinner, and a good bottle of wine. And if you want — if you have the price, of course — you can dally with a really beautiful girl. Not you, really, Joey. You're in no condition for that kind of stuff."

Carlin ran his tongue across his parched lips, and said nothing.

Gradek lifted one of Carlin's feet and began to ease the sock on gently over his toes. "I happen to have done some business with Grace Jones," he said. "Miss Jones is the proprietor of the Plume, and a very nice woman, too. When I called, she said she would be pleased to cash a G-note —

for a ten per cent rake-off, of course."

Gradek finished pulling on the sock, and made a flourishing gesture with his plump hands. "So, I have ordered a steak dinner for six o'clock, a dinner and a good bottle of wine. Maybe you might feel like eating a little, maybe, but I don't think you will feel like trifling with any lovely girls, Joey, huh? No, not tonight."

VII

Grace Jones had cowslip-colored hair, a face that was pink and slick, like a well-iced cake, and a body that was apparently losing a war against old age and excess flesh. She stared at the thousand-dollar bill, turning it over and over in her hands, and finally lifted her cool gaze to Gradek's face and gave the little fat man a fleeting smile. She paid no attention to Carlin.

"It certainly looks like the McCoy, Doc," she said in a hard baritone drawl. "And anyway, you wouldn't be simple enough to try to palm off a bum G-note on me. But you must have taken an elephant's liver out, to earn this much dough in one slice."

Gradek cut a chunk of rare beef from the slab of red meat on the table in front of him, forked it into his bruised mouth, chewed, and washed the meat down with a gulp of red wine.

"Confidentially, Miss Jones," he said, "I've performed an operation that will make medical history. I've succeeded in grafting a chorus girl's

legs onto the trunk of a spinster school teacher, in Queens. There isn't a boy in her class who will ever play truant again."

Carlin rested his head against a wall of the small, curtained private dining room. He sat with his eyes closed, because even the soft light of the room seemed to burn his eyeballs. The fever had given way to chills now, and his body shook as the cold seeped deep into his bones.

He heard the thousand-dollar bill crackle, and the scrape of the woman's chair as she pushed it back, and then Grace laughed, joggling the table as she arose.

"Your friend doesn't look very happy, does he, Doc?" she asked. "What is it, hangover? Or has he been taking some of your pills?"

"He's a man troubled by conscience," Gradek said, his mouth filled with food.

"He looks sort of familiar, too," the woman said. "Seems like I've seen him somewhere before. But not here, I don't think. Somehow he doesn't look like a customer of ours."

"Don't let his dirty raincoat fool you," Gradek answered. "Or the rest of his sloppy clothes. My friend is a rich eccentric. He could buy and sell this place."

Carlin heard the woman's thickening body move away from the table and the sound of a door as it was softly closed. He forced himself to open his eyes. He saw Gradek's face, flushed and sweating, and noisily chewing food. He let the leaden

weights of his eyelids fall down again.

"Please, Joey," Gradek said, "don't go out of your way to look like a zombie. Do me a favor, kid. I took a lot of risks bringing you in here, as hot as you are, even at an hour when there's nobody around."

"You'd have taken a lot of risk leaving me sit out in the car, too."

"All right. But, please, if anyone else comes in here, make like a living person."

Carlin opened his eyes again and stared at Gradek for a moment, and his eyes were pools of shadow under knit black brows. "Speaking of risks, Gradek," he said softly, "something's been bothering me. It could be that I'd wind up very dead, somewhere out in the Jersey marshes. Never get to Pennsy. A thing like that could happen, couldn't it, Doc?"

Gradek hacked at his steak with a sharp-bladed, bone-handled knife. He made a wry face. "Anything is possible in this world," he said. "But have you got anybody else to cart you around? If not, shut up. You've got to depend on me, Joey." He half rose from his chair, using his fork as a spear with which to reach a plate of rolls.

Carlin moved quickly. He made a swift movement with his hand, caught up another bone-handled knife, and thrust it into the raincoat pocket. The smell of the half-raw steak clawed at his nostrils as he leaned over the table, and his stomach seemed to constrict and then rise like a rocket against his throat.

"The first door to the left, down the hall," Gradek said. "I can imagine how you feel."

Carlin rose unsteadily, went to a door in the rear of the room, and pulled it open. He stumbled down an unlighted hallway that smelled of cold cooking and stale tobacco and perfume. He found the first door to his left and clawed his way into a room that was small and not luxurious. He was very sick in the close, bad-smelling darkness of the room. When he had finished, he pushed the single small window open and let the cool evening air blow in upon his face.

After a while, he went back into the hallway, but slowed when he heard the sound of heavy footsteps and loud voices from the private dining room. He took a few wavering steps forward, and leaned against a wall. He recognized Grace Jones' baritone as the other voices fell away.

"These gentlemen here are from the D.A.'s office, Gradek," the woman said. "They say they want to talk to you."

"Sure," Gradek said. "Talk all you want — and the first thing you can tell me is what this is all about."

"They know about the G-note," Grace said. "I'm sorry, Gradek, but I got caught short. They came in here and braced me, and how did I know they've been watching you for a long while? I want to stay in business, don't I? All right, so I figure it's the G-note they're after,

and I turn it over to them. So what?"

"But what have I done?" Gradek asked, and his thin voice rose in a kind of blustering scream. "Is it a crime to eat a good dinner, to drink a nice bottle of wine? Is it a crime to have a thousand-dollar bill?"

A man laughed, his voice a sardonic bass growl. "Maybe it is a crime to be passing out thousand-dollar bills, Pop — unless you can damned well explain where you got 'em."

"I would hate to be the D.A.," Gradek said in a bitter voice. "I would hate to be the D.A. and be hanging by my ears until he learns where I got that grand."

"What's the use, Gradek?" another male voice asked. "We saw you park that heap outside, and you got a whole briefcase full of surgical instruments in the car. Tell us some good reasons, Gradek. Tell us why an ex-con with no M.D. license should be packing a bunch of croaker's tools."

"I'll tell you a reason, flatfoot," Gradek said. "A reason you wouldn't have intellect enough to understand. Before a stupid, bungling jury and a moronic judge committed the criminal error of sending me to prison, I was a great surgeon. A great surgeon. I carry my old surgical instruments with me because of a sentimental attachment I have to them — like a great violin virtuoso who can no longer play might still carry his violin."

Grace Jones said sadly: "It's no

use, Doc. They got to Rosa. They told me that. They made her spill her guts. Your racket's finished."

Gradek shrugged heavily, and shambled to his feet. "All right," he said. "Let's go."

"One thing first," one of the men from the D.A.'s office said. "Where's the guy Grace said was with you — the guy looked like he'd been on a ten day diet of slow pills? Where'd the sleeper go, Gradek? Where'd he go?"

"For your information," Gradek said, "he's in the john. Sick. On account of eating some of the steak Grace served me, and drinking a glass of her wine. Even the food in prison is better than the stuff she serves here." He spat, and turned his broad back in her direction. "Let's go," he said again.

Carlin was already back in the toilet room when he heard the heavy footsteps coming down the hallway. He locked the door, and turned on both water taps. As fists pounded on the door, he climbed over the sill of the window and dropped into the alley beyond.

VIII

The living room of the apartment was long and wide, with three white walls that gleamed like old ivory in the semi-darkness. Carlin stood very still in the center of the room, on a piled carpet thick enough to muffle an elephant's tread. Listening intently, he heard no sound except the whistling hoarseness of his

own labored breathing, the ticking of an Ormolu clock on a curved mantelpiece beneath a tall mirror that reflected the hollow-cheeked, pain-ridden mask of his pale face.

He turned away from his reflection, moved silently towards the bedroom door. Light shimmered softly on the bone-handled knife as he drew it from his pocket, held it behind him, against the skirt of the raincoat that Burkman had once owned.

On the threshold of the door, Carlin sucked in his breath, held it as he moved cat-footed into the room in which Eve LaMotte stood naked before a full-length mirror.

Carlin stared at her firm, pointed breasts, at the soft curve of her stomach, mirrored in a long panel of shining glass; at the clean lines of her white flanks and the profiled breasts. Her flame-colored hair rippled about her white shoulders, and her back was a flawless, deeply indented marble wedge, tapering into a slender waist.

Carlin moved up behind her. He held the long supple blade of the steak knife pressed against his forearm, and he let his knuckles touch the warm curve of her throat.

"Don't yell," he whispered. "Don't make a sound. Just do what I tell you, and you won't get hurt."

He felt the girl shudder beneath his clenched fist, saw the dark eyes jerk up and go wide with terror, looking at his reflection in the glass. Carlin ground his knuckles against

her mouth, muffling the scream that rose in her throat. "Keep quiet," he said. "You yell, and I'll kill you. You make any noise, I'll kill you. Do what I say, and I won't hurt you at all. So help me, I won't."

The frightened eyes stayed on his face a moment, and then she shivered and hunched her shoulders in a despairing shrug. She made a gesture of resignation with her narrow hands and spoke with her lips soft and moist against his fist. "I won't yell," she said. "Take your hand off me. I promise I won't yell."

Carlin withdrew his fist, keeping the knife carefully hidden from her sight. "I don't want you," he said. "I don't want you the . . . the way I did before. I didn't come for that."

The girl moved away from him slowly and sat down before her vanity. She drew her long legs up onto the seat and wrapped her bare arms about them. "Why, then?" she asked, her teeth chattering behind the sensuous lips. "Why did you come? You cleaned me out last time. You took every bit of jewelry Eddie'd given me in four years — in all the time we've been together. I haven't anything of value; nothing but a few dollars in my purse."

"Sure, sure, baby," Carlin said. "Listen, I want two things. To get even with a guy, and to grab some getaway dough. You're going to help me do both."

She stared at him without saying anything, and he let the knife fall into a pocket of the raincoat. He

crossed to the wide bed that filled a corner of the room and picked up the negligee that lay upon a silken pillow. The negligee was a filmy cloud of almost transparent silk, the same one she had been wearing the first time Carlin had seen her. Carlin sighed and turned and brought the negligee back to her, and stood over her as she drew the clinging green stuff around her body.

"Here's how you're going to help me," he said. "You're going to make a phone call — to Paul Velco."

"You mean that fat politician I sometimes see around town?"

"That's him," Carlin said. "A guy who's got a lot of things, including a yen for Eve LaMotte, a yen that's eating him alive. So you're going to call him. You're going to tell Velco that your boy friend Eddie's out of town, and that he left you no dough, and that you can't cash a check. Then you'll tell Velco you're all alone, and ask him will he lend you a couple hundred bucks, to last you until Eddie gets home. You'll tell him that you're alone, and he'll bring you the money, personally, here. And you tell him to give four rings, two long, two short, so that you'll know it's him."

"Take it easy! God!" Her eyes were slightly narrowed now. While they waited, the girl asked him, "How'd you get in here, anyhow? I paid a guy ten bucks to change the lock on the door, after your last little visit."

"It was easy," Carlin said. "I've had a lot of practice with locks. I

heard the water running in the bathtub, and it covered what little noise I made. I didn't make much."

The doorbell of the apartment was a soft chime, and its music came to them then, in two long, and two short bursts of pleasant sound.

Carlin came to his feet like a marionette jerked by violent strings. His legs were shaking, but he crossed to the girl quickly and pushed his face close to hers.

"Now listen to me!" he snarled. "Get what I tell you! I'll be behind the door when you open it. You turn right around and come back here, and he'll follow you, and I'll close the door. I'll take it from there."

Eve LaMotte looked at his face, and the dark eyes were round with fear. "What are you going to do?" she asked. "You're not going to —?" She choked as she looked into his eyes. "Oh, God, no! Not here!"

"Do like I said," Carlin told her, "and maybe you won't get hurt."

He was behind the door when the girl opened it to admit Velco. He stood so close to him that he could smell the perfume and talcum and pomade aroma of the big man as he followed the girl out of the hallway and into the dim light of the living room. He gripped the knife handle so tightly that his fingernails were like sharp blades digging into his palms. He moved soundlessly to the end of the short hallway, and paused.

Velco chuckled, a soft, growling

noise deep in his throat. "What a surprise, Baby, your call was," he said to the girl. "Last thing I expected, but I don't have to tell you it's all right. Plenty all right."

The girl laughed, a nearly hysterical cackle.

"That stinking Eddie, to leave you without dough," Velco said softly. "But, it's a break for me." He nudged her, and began to laugh.

To Joe Carlin, the big man's laughter sounded like tearing silk. He saw the vast belly shake. Then he came into the room, on tiptoe, and halted six feet away from Velco's back.

"You know something, baby," Velco went on. "I didn't bring you the lousy two C's you asked for. I thought it would be nicer if I brought you a special little present. A little token of how much a guy like me appreciates a really beautiful dame."

Carlin heard the stiff crackle of paper as Velco reached a hand into the breast pocket of his coat. The light shone dully on an envelope in his pudgy fingers.

Velco purred, "Me, I like to do everything the big way. The great big way. So, you ask me to lend you a couple of hundred dollars, instead, I bring you *this* — as a gift. Here, baby — a thousand-dollar bill."

Velco's words burst and echoed in Joe Carlin's brain. *A thousand-dollar bill.* Not the two hundred bucks Velco should have brought, the two hundred bucks that would have taken Carlin to Pennsylvania and the farm where he could get well. No! Velco had to big-dog it with a *thousand-dollar bill!*

Carlin heard himself yell, a choking, sobbing scream that seemed to rip at his throat, a shriek that turned somehow into a swelling crimson bubble within his head, and broke against his skull in a tearing burst of pain. He plunged forward and drove the steak knife into Velco's broad back. From the corner of his eye, he saw the girl as she ran, screaming hysterically, out of the apartment door. Then he twisted the knife loose and buried the long blade in Velco's body again.

He was still crouched near Velco's corpse when the police came. He flung himself at them, but the knife was deep in Velco's back, and there was nothing in Carlin's hand but a torn and bloody fragment of a thousand-dollar bill.

He ran straight at the cop who shouted at him to halt. The cop shouted again, and then, when Carlin came screaming on, the cop fired straight into Carlin's writhing face.





Mugger Murder

BY RICHARD DEMING

*It was difficult to understand the police interest in the case.
There's nothing illegal about killing a thief who attacks you.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *There's something special about this story and the one which follows. We'll discuss them further after you've read both.*

I WAS surprised to see Sergeant Nels Parker in the Coroner's Court audience, for homicide detectives spend too much of their time there on official business to develop any morbid curiosity about cases not assigned to them. I was in the audience myself, of course, but as a police reporter this was my regular beat on Friday mornings, and after five years of similar Friday mornings, nothing but the continued necessity of making a living could have gotten me within miles of the place.

When I spotted him two rows ahead of me, I moved up and slid into the vacant seat next to him.

"Busman's holiday, Sergeant?" I asked.

His long face turned and he cocked one dull eye at me. For so many years Nels had practiced looking dull in order to throw homicide witnesses off guard, the expression had become habitual.

"How are you, Sam?" he said.

"You haven't got a case today, have you?" I persisted.

His head gave a small shake and he turned his eyes front again. Since he seemed to have no desire to explain his presence, I let the matter drop. But as the only inquest scheduled was on the body of a Joseph Garcia, age twenty-one and of no known address, I at least knew what case interested him.

The first witness was a patrolman named Donald Lutz, a thick bodied and round faced young fellow who looked as though he, like the dead

man, was no more than twenty-one.

In response to the deputy coroner's request to describe the circumstances of Joseph Garcia's death as he knew them, the youthful patrolman said, "Well, it was Wednesday . . . night before last . . . about eleven thirty, and I was walking my beat along Broadway just south of Market. As I passed this alley mouth, I heard a scuffling sound in the alley and flashed my light down it. I saw these two guys struggling, one with a hammerlock on the other guy's head, and just as my light touched them, the guy with the hammerlock gave a hard twist, the other guy went sort of limp, and the first guy let him drop to the alley floor. I moved in with my night stick ready, but the guy stood still and made no move either to run or come at me. He just stood there with his hands at his sides and said, 'Officer, this man tried to rob me.'

"I told him to stand back, and knelt to look at the man lying down. Near as I could tell, he was dead, but in the dark with just a flashlight I couldn't be sure, and I didn't want to take a chance on him waking up and running away while I went to the nearest call box. So I stayed right there and used my stick on the concrete to bring the cop from the next beat. That was Patrolman George Mason.

"Mason went to call for a patrol car and a doctor while I stayed with the two guys. That's about all I

know about things except when the doctor got there, he said the guy lying down was dead."

The deputy coroner said, "And the dead man was later identified as Joseph Garcia?"

Patrolman Lutz nodded. "Yes, sir."

"And the man Garcia was struggling with. Will you identify him, please?"

The policeman pointed his finger at a short, plump man of about fifty seated in a chair apart from the audience and within a few feet of where the jury was lined up along the left wall. He was a quietly dressed man with a bland, faintly vacuous smile and an appearance of softness about him until you examined him closely. Then you suspected that a good deal of his plumpness was muscle rather than fat, and you noticed his shoulders were unnaturally wide.

"That's him there," the young patrolman said. "Robert Hummel."

Just in front of the platform containing the deputy coroner's bench was a long table, one end pointing toward the platform and the other end toward the audience. On the right side of this table, seated side-wise to it with his back to the audience, sat the assistant circuit attorney in charge of the case. On its left side sat Marcus Prout, one of St. Louis's most prominent criminal lawyers.

Now the assistant C.A. said; "Patrolman Lutz, I understand Robert

Hummel had in his possession a .38 caliber pistol at the time of the incident you just described. Is that right?"

"Well, not exactly in his possession, sir. It was lying in the alley nearby, where he'd dropped it. It turned out he had a permit to carry it."

Marcus Prout put in, "Officer, was there any other weapon in sight?"

"Yes, sir. An open clasp knife lay in the alley. This was later established as belonging to the deceased. Robert Hummel claimed Garcia drew it on him, he in turn drew his gun to defend himself, and ordered the deceased to drop the knife. However, the deceased continued to come at him. Hummel said he didn't want to shoot the man, so he used the gun to knock the knife from Garcia's hand, then dropped the gun and grappled with him."

The lawyer asked, "Was there any mark on the deceased's wrist to support that statement?"

"The post mortem report notes a bruise," the deputy coroner interrupted, and glanced over at the jury.

Marcus Prout rose from his chair and strolled toward the patrolman. "Officer, did the deceased . . . this Joseph Garcia . . . have a police record?"

"Yes, sir. One arrest and a suspended sentence for mugging."

"Mugging is a slang term for robbery with force, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Generally without a weapon. You get a guy around the neck from behind and go through his pockets with your free hand. There's other methods classified as mugging, but that's the way Garcia did it the time he was convicted."

The lawyer said, "Did you draw any inference from the fact that Robert Hummel, with a gun against a knife, used the gun merely to disarm his opponent and then grappled with him with his bare hands?"

The policeman said, "I don't exactly know what you mean."

"I mean, did it not occur to you as obvious Robert Hummel's statement that he did not wish to shoot his opponent was true, and that he went out of his way to avoid seriously injuring Garcia, when under the circumstances he would have been fully justified in shooting the man through the heart? And that Garcia's subsequent death in spite of Mr. Hummel's precaution must have been an accident resulting from Robert Hummel exerting more strength than he intended in the excitement of the moment?"

This leading question would have been stricken from the record in a regular court, of course, for not only was it deliberately slanted at the jury rather than to the witness, it asked for an opinion on a matter of which the witness could not possibly have had actual knowledge. But in Coroner's Court the legal formalities of a court of law are almost entirely lacking inasmuch as no one is on trial

for anything, the jury's sole duty being to determine how the deceased met death. I was therefore not surprised when neither the assistant circuit attorney nor the deputy coroner made any objection to the question.

Patrolman Lutz said he had not thought about the matter, which seemed to satisfy Marcus Prout, as he had asked the question only to implant it in the jury's mind anyway. The lawyer went back to his seat.

When the deputy coroner asked if there were any more questions, both Prout and the assistant C.A. shook their heads. The patrolman was dismissed and Norman Paisley was called as a witness.

Norman Paisley was a thin, dried up man of middle age who looked like a school janitor. To the deputy coroner's first question he gave his address as a rooming house on South Broadway two blocks south of Market.

"Were you a customer at Stoyle's Tavern on Sixth near Olive this past Wednesday night?" the deputy coroner asked.

"Yes, sir. All evening from seven till they closed at one thirty."

"Did you know the deceased Joseph Garcia?"

"To talk to, yes, sir. I used to run into him at Stoyle's Tavern off and on. I didn't know where he lived or what he did, or nothing like that, though."

"I see. Was the deceased a customer at Stoyle's that night?"

"Yes, sir. He come in several times during the evening. I guess he was bar cruising all up and down Sixth Street."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, sir."

The deputy coroner said, "Do you recognize any other person now present as a customer at Stoye's the night before last?"

Norman Paisley pointed at Robert Hummel. "Him. He come in about a quarter of eleven and left at eleven fifteen. I noticed him particular because he bought the house a couple of drinks."

The assistant C.A. cut in. "Was Joseph Garcia present during this period?"

"Yes, sir. He even remarked about it. When Mr. Hummel bought a drink, Joe said to me, 'That damn fool must be made of money. He just bought the house a drink at a place I was in up the street.'"

Marcus Prout asked, "Did you get the impression Garcia was following Hummel?"

"No, sir. Joe come in first, as a matter of fact, and Mr. Hummel come in right after him."

The lawyer looked surprised. He started to ask another question, changed his mind and waved his hand dismissively. The assistant C.A. stepped into the breach.

"Mr. Paisley, did you get the impression the deceased was particularly interested in Robert Hummel?"

"Not right at first. But when Hummel bought the second drink,

he happened to be standing close to Joe at the bar, and when he opened his wallet to pay, Joe looked kind of startled. I was standing the other side of Joe, but even from there I could see there was a lot of bills in it. After that Joe couldn't seem to keep his eyes off Hummel."

Marcus Prout spoke again. "When Hummel finally left the bar, did Garcia follow him?"

"Yes, sir. He went right out after him."

The assistant C.A. said, "Did you get the impression Garcia left because Hummel did? That is, that the deceased was actually following Mr. Hummel? Or that he just happened to leave about the same time?"

"Why, I don't know," Paisley said. "I never thought about it at the time. I guess Joe must of followed him out figuring to roll him."

Marcus Prout smiled at this answer and the assistant C.A. grunted. When both indicated they had no further questions, the witness was dismissed.

Shuffling the papers in front of him, the deputy coroner located the post mortem report, cleared his throat and said, "The autopsy shows death by suffocation due to a crushed larynx."

Following this announcement, he rose from his bench, advanced to the edge of the platform and asked in a loud voice, "Are any relatives of the deceased present?"

When there was no reply to this

routine question, he turned to the jury and signified they were to go out.

While the six man jury was out, I tried to figure what Nels Parker's interest in the case could be. On the surface it was simply a case of a mugger being killed in self-defense by his intended victim, and the inquest was obviously a routine affair designed to clear the intended victim of any blame. The slant of the questions, not only of Robert Hummel's lawyer, but those of the assistant circuit attorney and the deputy coroner as well, indicated no one expected or wanted any verdict other than justifiable homicide.

I had no time to question Nels about it though, for the jury was out only thirty seconds. When it filed back in, the foreman read the verdict I expected: justifiable homicide.

Ordinarily, beyond noting down his name, age and address for my news item, I would have paid no further attention to the man who had just been cleared of homicide, for he was not a particularly impressive person. Nels Parker's unexplained interest in the case intrigued me though, and noting the sergeant continued to linger in the courtroom until Robert Hummel finished shaking hands with his lawyer and finally moved toward the door, I lingered beside him.

When Robert Hummel was erect, you were less conscious of his unusually broad shoulders and the muscle underlying his fat than you

were when he was seated. He looked like a well fed businessman who had reached the age when he ought to start watching his blood pressure. He also looked like the last person in the world you would expect to resist a professional mugger so successfully and so violently that the mugger ended up dead.

As the man passed from the courtroom, Nels continued to watch his back through the open door until he reached the stairs at the end of the hall and started down. Then the sergeant gave his head a slight shake and moved toward the stairs himself.

Falling in beside him, I said, "Buy you a drink, Sergeant?"

His dull eyes flicked at me. "One beer maybe. I got to get back to Homicide."

The nearest tavern to the Coroner's Court Building was a half block west. I waited until we were standing at the bar with a pair of draft beers in front of us before I asked any questions.

Then I said, "A story hidden here somewhere, Sergeant?"

He shook his head, tapped his glass once on the bar to indicate luck and sipped at his beer. "No story, Sam."

"Not even off the record?"

"Just a pipe dream I had, Sam. You couldn't print it without risking a libel suit."

"Then I won't print it. But I got curiosity. Whose case was this Garcia's? On Homicide, I mean."

"Corporal Brady," Nels said. "He wasn't there because the thing was so routine, all they needed was the beat cop's testimony. Probably I ought to have my head examined for wasting my time on a case I wasn't even assigned to."

When he lapsed into silence I asked, "What's the story?"

He drank half his beer before he answered. Then he said, "I was just interested because this guy Hummel killed a guy once before."

I raised my eyebrows.

"Almost the same circumstances too," the sergeant said. "A mugger down along Commercial Alley. Only that time the guy's larynx wasn't crushed. Hummel just choked him to death."

"Judus Priest!" I said. "Was there an inquest?"

Nels nodded. "Routine. Happened about twelve years ago. There's no doubt it was on the up and up. The mugger had a record as long as your arm and it was pretty well established Hummel never saw the guy before he was suddenly waylaid by him. Apparently the mugger had been loitering in a doorway for some time waiting for a likely victim to pass, for they turned up a witness placing him there a full hour before he tangled with Hummel. Picking Hummel was pure accident, and the mugger was just unlucky to jump a guy who looked soft, but turned out to have the strength of a gorilla." The sergeant paused, then added reflectively, "There wasn't any

of this flashing a roll in dives then."

His tone as he made the last statement struck me as odd. "What do you mean by that?" I asked.

But the sergeant ignored my question. "Hummel didn't carry a gun then either. Matter of fact, it was as a result of the incident that he applied for a permit. He didn't have trouble getting one, because he's an antique and rare coin buyer and carries large amounts of cash."

"You've been doing some detailed checking on the man," I remarked.

"Yeah. But it doesn't add up."

I eyed him narrowly for a moment, then signaled the bartender for two more beers. I said, "Now give me the pipe dream."

"Pipe dream?" he asked.

"You mentioned your interest in the case was a kind of pipe dream. You think there's some connection between the two cases?"

Nels took a sip of his fresh beer and shook his head. "I'm sure there isn't. Not between the two muggers anyway. Maybe a kind of psychological connection."

"What does that mean?"

"Well," the sergeant said slowly, "I figure the case twelve years ago was just what it seemed to be. A guy unexpectedly jumped Hummel, and Hummel killed him defending himself. So was the case today, I guess. With a slight difference. Maybe this time Hummel killed deliberately when he was jumped."

"You mean he deliberately lured Garcia into attacking him?"

"Think back over the testimony," Nels said. "Remember how surprised the great lawyer looked when the witness said Hummel had followed Joe in?"

"There was even something about Garcia remarking he had run into Hummel in another tavern. But why? What would be Hummel's motive?"

Nels was silent for a moment. Finally he said, "I checked back over unsolved homicides for the past twelve years, and seven of them were guys with records as muggers. They were found dead in alleys, some strangled, some broken necks."

"My God!" I said.

"That makes nine he could have killed."

For a moment I couldn't speak. "But why, for God's sake?"

Without inflection Nels said, "Twelve years ago I imagine Robert Hummel was just a normal guy. Or at least I imagine any abnormal urges he had were merely latent. Then he killed in self-defense. My pipe dream is that maybe he discovered he enjoyed it. You've heard of psychopathic killers."

"But . . . but . . ." I stuttered.

"But what? A guy flashes a roll in dives. There any law to stop him? A mugger tails him for an easy roll. The guy kills the mugger, and if nobody sees it, he just walks away. If he gets caught in the act, he merely tells the truth and the law

gives him a pat on the back for defending himself against attack by a criminal. It's a psychopath's dream. He's figured a way to kill legally."

"But . . ." I whispered. "But . . . he couldn't possibly again. . ."

"The law says you can use whatever force is necessary to resist attack on your person or property. If you use more than necessary, theoretically you're guilty of manslaughter. In the case of a farmer shooting a kid stealing watermelons, we can prove unnecessary force, but how do you prove it in a case like today's? And even if we established beyond reasonable doubt that Hummel deliberately enticed a robbery attempt . . . which we couldn't do without a confession, no matter what we suspect . . . he still has a legal right to defend himself."

"You mean you intend to do nothing about a homicidal maniac?"

"Sure," Nels said calmly. "Next time we'll put a white light in his face and hammer questions at him until Marcus Prout walks in with a writ of habeas corpus. But unless we get a confession that he used more force than necessary to protect himself, he's safe even if he kills a man every week."

He laughed without any humor whatever, "Beyond picking him up and questioning him every time he kills, there isn't one damned thing in the world we can do to stop him."





Kid Kill

Willis hated the assignment: a routine tragic accidental shooting of one kid by another. He hated it more when he turned up an odd newspaper clipping.

IT WAS just a routine call. I remember I was sitting around with Ed, talking about a movie we'd both seen, when Marelli walked in, a sheet of paper in his hand.

"You want to take this, Art?"

I looked up, pulled a face, and said, "Who stabbed who now?"

"This is an easy one," Marelli said, smiling. He smoothed his moustache in an unconscious gesture and added, "Accidental shooting."

"Then why bother Homicide?"

"Accidental shooting resulting in death," Marelli said.

I got up, hitched up my trousers, and sighed. "They always pick the coldest goddamn days of the year to play with war souvenirs." I looked at the frost edging the windows and then turned back to Marelli. "It *was* a war souvenir, wasn't it?"

"A Luger," Marelli said. "9 m/m with 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ inch barrel. The man on the beat checked it."

"Was it registered?"

"You tell me."

"Stupid characters," I said. "You'd think the law wasn't for their own protection." I sighed again and looked over to where Ed was trying to make himself small. "Come on, Ed, time to work."

Ed shuffled to his feet. He was a big man with bright red hair, and a nose broken by an escaped con back in '45. It happened that the con was a little runt, about five feet high in his Adler elevators, and Ed had taken a lot of ribbing about that broken nose—even though we all knew the con had used a lead pipe.

"Trouble with you, Marelli," he said in his deep voice, "you take your job too seriously."

Marelli looked shocked. "Is it my fault some kid accidentally plugs his brother?"

"What?" I asked. I had taken my overcoat from the peg and was shrug-

BY EVAN HUNTER

ging into it now. "What was that, Marelli?"

"It was a kid," Marelli said. Ten years old. He was showing his younger brother the Luger when it went off. Hell, you know these things."

I pulled my muffler tight around my neck and then buttoned my coat. "This is just a waste of time," I said. "Why do the police always have to horn in on personal tragedies?"

Marelli paused near the table, dropping the paper with the information on it. "Every killing is a personal tragedy for someone," he said. I stared at him as he walked to the door, waved, and went out.

"Pearls from a flatfoot," Ed said. "Come on, let's get this over with."

It was bitter cold, the kind of cold that attacks your ears and your hands, and makes you want to huddle around a potbelly stove. Ed pulled the Mercury up behind the white-topped squad car, and we climbed out, losing the warmth of the car heater. The beat man was standing near the white picket fence that ran around the small house. His uniform collar was pulled high onto the back of his neck, and his eyes and nose were running. He looked as cold as I felt.

Ed and I walked over to him, and he saluted, then began slapping his gloved hands together.

"I been waitin' for you, sir," he said. "My name's Connerly. I put in the call."

"Detective Sergeant Willis," I

said. "This is my partner, Ed Daley."

"Hiya," Ed said.

"Hell of a thing, ain't it, sir?"

"Sounds routine to me," Ed put in. "Kid showing off his big brother's trophy, bang! His little brother is dead. Happens every damned day of the week."

"Sure, sir, but I mean . . ."

"Family inside?" I asked.

"Just the mother, sir. That's what makes it more of a tragedy, you see."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Well, sir, she's a widow. Three sons. The oldest was killed in the last war. He's the one sent the Luger home. Now this. Well, sir, you know what I mean."

"Sure," I said. "Let's get inside!"

Connerly led us to the front door, and rapped on it with a gloved hand. Ed stole a glance at me, and I knew he didn't relish this particular picnic any more than I did.

The door opened quickly, and a small woman with dark blue eyes opened the door. She might have been pretty once, but that was a long time ago, and all the beauty had fled from her, leaving her tired and defeated.

"Mrs. Owens, this is Detective-Sergeant Willis and his partner," Connerly said.

Mrs. Owens nodded faintly.

"May we come in, ma'm?" I asked.

She seemed to remember her manners all at once. "Yes, please," she said. "Please do." Her voice was

stronger than her body looked, and I wondered if she were really as old as she seemed. A widow, one son killed in the war. Death can sometimes do that to a person. Leave them more withered than the corpse.

"We're sorry to bother you, ma'm," I said, feeling foolish as hell, the way I always did in a situation like this. "The law requires us to make a routine check, however, and . . ."

"That's quite all right, Mr. Willis." She moved quickly to the couch and straightened the doilies. "Sit down, won't you?"

"Thank you, ma'm." I sat down with Ed on my right. Connerly stood near the radiator, his hands behind his back.

Ed took out his pad, and cleared his throat. I took that as my cue and said, "Can you tell us exactly what happened, ma'm?"

"Well, I . . . I don't really know, exactly. You see, I was in the kitchen baking. This is Wednesday, and I usually bake on Wednesdays. The boys . . ." She hesitated and bit her lip. "The boys like pie, and I try to bake one at least once a week."

"Yes, ma'm."

"I . . . I was putting the pie into the oven when I heard this . . . this noise from the attic. I knew the boys were up there playing so I didn't think anything of it."

"What are the boys' names, ma'm?"

"Jeffrey. He's my oldest. And . . . and . . ."

"Yes, ma'm?" I swallowed.

"Ronald."

"Was Ronald the boy who was shot, ma'm?"

She didn't answer. She simply nodded her head. I got up because I was embarrassed as hell, and I began walking around the room. On top of the upright piano, four photos in silver frames beamed up at me. One was of an older man, obviously the dead Mr. Owens. A second was of a young man in an Army uniform, with infantry rifles crossed on his lapel. The other two were of the younger boys.

Mrs. Owens blew her nose in a small handkerchief and looked up.

"Which one is Jeffrey?" I asked.

"The . . . the blond boy."

I looked at the photo. He seemed like a nice kid, with a pleasant smile, and his mother's dark eyes. "Is he in the house?"

"Yes. He's upstairs in his room."

"I'd like to talk to him, ma'm."

"All right."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to see the attic first."

She seemed about to refuse, and then she nodded. "Certainly."

"You needn't come up, Mrs. Owens," Ed said. "The patrolman can show us the way."

"Thank you," she said.

We followed Connerly up the steps, and he whispered, "See what I mean? Jesus, this is a rotten business."

"Well, what are you gonna do?" Ed philosophized.

The attic had been fixed as a playroom, with plasterboard walls and ceiling. An electric train layout covered one half of the room. In the other half, covered with a sheet, lay young Ronald Owens. I walked over and lifted the sheet, looking down at the boy. He resembled the older Jeffrey a great deal, except that his hair was brown. He had the same dark eyes, though, staring up at me now, sightless. There was a neat hole between his eyes, and his face was an ugly mixture of blood and powder burns. I put the sheet back.

"Where's the gun?" I asked Connerly.

"Right here, sir."

He fished into his pocket and produced the Luger rapped carefully in his handkerchief. I opened the handkerchief and stared at the German gun.

"Did you break it open, Connerly?"

"Why, no, sir. A patrolman isn't allowed to . . ."

"Can it," I said. "If you broke it open, you'll save me the trouble."

Connerly looked abashed. "Yes, sir, I did."

"Any shells in it?"

"No, sir."

"Not even in the firing chamber?"

"No, sir."

"One bullet, then. That's strange."

"What's so strange about it?" Ed wanted to know.

"A Luger's magazine fed, that's all," I said. "Eight slugs in a clip.

Strange to find only one." I shrugged, handing the pistol back to Connerly. "Let's see what else is around here."

We started rummaging around the attic, not really looking for anything in particular. I think I was just postponing the talk I had to have with the young kid who'd shot his own brother.

"Bunch of books," Ed said.

"Mmmm?"

"Yeah. Few old newspaper clippings."

"Here's something," Connerly cut in.

"What have you got?"

"Looks like a box of clips, sir."

"Yeah? For the Luger?"

"Looks that way, sir."

I walked over to where Connerly was standing, and took the box from the shelf. He had carefully restrained from touching it. The box was covered with a fine layer of dust. There were two clips in the open box, and they too were covered with dust. I lifted one of the clips out, running my eyes over the cartridges. Eight. The second clip had only seven cartridges in it.

"Only seven here," I said.

"Yeah," Connerly said, nodding. "That's where the bullet came from all right."

"Anything else there, Ed?" I turned to where Ed squatted on the floor.

"Just these loose newspaper clippings. Nothing really . . . hey!"

"What've you got?"

"That's strange as hell," Ed said.

"What? What is so strange?"

He got to his feet and walked over to me, holding a clipping in his big hand. "Take a look at this, Art."

The clipping was scissored from one of the tabloids. It was simply the story of a boy and a girl who'd been playing in their back yard. Playing with a Colt .45 that was a war souvenir. The .45 had gone off, blowing half the girl's head away. There was a picture of the boy in tears, and a story of the fatal accident.

"Some coincidence, huh, Art?"

"Yeah," I said. "Some coincidence."

I put the box of clips back on the shelf. "I think I'd better talk to the kid now," I said.

We left the attic, and Connerly whispered something about the way fate sometimes works. He called Mrs. Owens, and she came up to lead me to the boy's room on the second floor of the house.

She rapped on the door and softly called, "Jeffrey?"

I could hear sobbing beyond the door, and then a muffled, "Yes?"

"Some gentlemen would like to talk to you," she said.

The sobbing stopped, and I heard the sound of bare feet padding to the door. The door opened and Jeffrey stood there, drying his face. He was thinner than the photograph had shown him, with bright blue eyes and narrow lips. His hair hung over his forehead in unruly strands, and there were streaks under his eyes and down his cheeks.

"You're policemen, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes, son."

"We just want to ask a few questions," Ed said.

"Come in."

We walked into the room. There were two beds in it, one on either side of the large window. There was one dresser, and I imagined the two boys shared this. Toys were packed neatly in a carton on one side of the room. A high school pennant, and several college pennants decorated the walls, and a model airplane hung from the ceiling.

Mrs. Owens started into the room and Ed said gently, "If we can talk to him alone . . ."

Her hand went to her mouth, and she said, "Oh. Oh, all right."

Jeffrey walked to his bed and sat on it, one leg tucked under him. He stared out of the window, not looking at us.

"Want to tell us how it happened, son?"

"It was an accident," he said. "I didn't mean to do it, honest."

"We know," Ed said. "We just want to know how it happened."

"Well, we were upstairs playing with the trains, and then we got sort of tired. We started kidding around, and then I found Perry's . . . that's my other brother, who was killed in the war . . . I found Perry's Luger and we started foolin' around with that."

"Is that the first time you saw the gun, son?"

"No, no." He turned to look me full in the face. "Perry sent it home a long time ago. Before he was killed, even. One of his buddies brought it to us."

"Uh-huh. Go on, son."

"Well, then we found the bullets in the box. I . . ."

"You didn't know the bullets were there before this?"

"No." Again, Jeffrey stared at me. "No, we just found them today."

"Did you know where the gun was?"

"Well . . . yes."

"You said you found it, though. You didn't mean that, did you, son?"

"Well, I knew it was in the attic someplace because that's where Mom put it. I didn't know just where until I found it today."

"Oh, I see. Go on, please." Ed looked at me curiously, and then returned his interest to the boy.

"We found the bullets, and I took one from one of the magazines, just to fool around. I stuck it into the gun and then all at once the gun went off and . . . and . . . Ronnie . . . Ronnie . . ."

The kid turned his face away, then threw himself onto the pillow.

"I didn't mean to do it. Honest, honest. The gun just went off. I didn't know it would go off. It just did. I loved my brother. I loved my brother. Now there's just me and Mom, just the two of us. I didn't want it to happen. I didn't!"

"Sure, son," I said. I walked to the bed and sat down beside him. "You liked your brother a lot. I know. I have a brother, too."

Ed gave me another curious look, but I continued to pat the kid's shoulder.

"Yes," Jeffrey said, "I did like him. I liked Perry, too, and he was killed. And now . . . now this. Now there's just me and Mom. They're all gone. Dad, and Perry, and . . . and . . . Ronnie. Now we're all alone." He started bawling again. "It's my fault. If I hadn't wanted to play with that old gun . . ."

"It's not your fault," I said. "Accidents happen. They happen all the time. No one could possibly blame you for it."

His tears ebbed slowly, and he finally sat up again. "You know it's not my fault, don't you?" he asked solemnly.

"Yes," I said. "We know."

He tried to smile, but failed. "It was just an accident," he repeated.

"Sure," I said. I picked myself off the bed and said, "Let's go, Ed. Nothing more for us here."

At the door, I turned to look at Jeffrey once more. He seemed immensely relieved, and he smiled when I winked at him. The smile was still on his mouth and in his eyes when we left him.

It was cold in the Merc, even with the heater going.

We drove in silence for a long

time, and finally Ed asked, "All right, what was all that business about?"

"What business?"

"First of all, that brother routine. You know damn well you're a lousy, spoiled only child."

"Sure," I said. "I wanted to hear the kid tell me how much he loved all his brothers."

"That's another thing. Why the hell did you cross-examine the kid? Jesus, he had enough trouble without your . . ."

"I was just wondering about a few things," I said. "That's all."

"What kind of things?"

"Well, the clipping about the little boy who accidentally killed that girl, for one. Now why do you suppose any kid would save a clipping like that?"

"Hell," Ed said, "you know how kids are. It probably caught his fancy, that's all."

"Probably. Maybe the Luger magazines caught his fancy, too."

"What do you mean?"

"The kid said he found those magazines for the first time today. He said he took a cartridge from one of the clips and stuck it into the gun. Tell me how he managed to handle a dust-covered magazine without smearing any of the dust?"

"Why, he . . ." Ed hesitated.

"He didn't, that's the answer. He took that bullet from the clip a long time ago, Ed. Long enough ago for the box and the magazine to acquire a new coat of dust. This was no spur-of-the-minute job. No, sir, not at all."

"Hey," Ed said suddenly. "What the hell are you trying to say? You mean the kid did this on purpose? You mean he actually killed his brother? *Murdered* him?"

"Just him and Mom now, Ed. Just the two of them. No more Dad, no more big brother, and now no more little brother." I shook my head, and stared at my own breath as it clouded the windshield.

"But just take it to a judge," I added. "Just take the whole fantastic thing to a judge and see how fast he kicks you out of court."

Ed glanced at me quickly, and then turned his eyes back to the road.

"We'll have to watch that kid," I said, "maybe get him psychiatric care. I hate to think what would happen if he suddenly builds up a dislike for his mother."

I didn't say anything after that, but it was a cold ride back to the station.

Damned cold.



CRIME and PUNISHMENT

BY SHEPHERD KOLE

Editor's note (continued): You've undoubtedly noticed the striking similarity of theme in the preceding Deming and Hunter stories — that theme being that murder will not necessarily out; and if it does out, it will not necessarily be punished. The stories came in separately from different parts of the country, and the fascinating theme caused us to dig a little deeper into the concept, and to run the stories together as a special feature. We asked Mr. Shepherd Kole, of the prominent law firm of Kole and Kole, 39 Broadway, New York, N. Y., to read both stories and comment on the authenticity of the premise. Mr. Kole is a graduate of the St. John's University Law School. He has tried hundreds of criminal and civil cases. In addition, he was a member of the New York City Police force, and was awarded the Sherman Day medal for valor in the apprehension of two parolees from Dannemora in a gunfight. He is a member of the Committee on International Law of the New York County Lawyers' Association, and is thoroughly familiar with every phase of criminal law and procedure. His comments follow.

IN THE Donohue case (1902) 114 APP Div. 2nd Dept. 830, a judge of the New York Appellate bench said, "Innocence is an attribute of children." There are, however, countless instances of children older beyond their years in crime, wickedness, and cunning. Mr. Hunter has presented just such a child in his story *Kid Kill*, in which a ten-year-old boy commits murder.

And, if murder has been committed, it should follow logically that

murder should be punished. Such is the ideal case. Add to this the fact that there is a bland malevolence in a child's crime which gives it an enormity beyond that of any other crime. Such a crime *should* be punished.

But — and here is the big but — how?

Even if the child were brought to trial, he would undoubtedly be faced with an indulgent judge, a shame-faced D.A., a very self-con-

scious detective, and an overly sympathetic jury. The child's innocence would be accepted before a word was spoken, and the prosecuting attorney would probably be apprehensive throughout the proceedings.

Mr. Hunter's little boy could conceivably be held for murder, then, but to what avail?

It is interesting to note that the child in the Hunter story could very easily grow up to become the man in Mr. Deming's *Mugger Murder*. Let us establish once and for all that there is no way to murder legally. Murder goes undiscovered, murder goes unprosecuted. But if it is discovered, a conviction will undoubtedly be sought. But — and here again is the big but — how would such a conviction be brought about in a case such as this one? Proof would be, at the least, extremely difficult. The justifiable

homicide defense would be almost impossible to overcome, and the conviction of this killer under the circumstances outlined in the story (remembering that there are only two possibly provable homicides involved) would be extremely doubtful.

Again, we are faced with a jury whose sympathy would undoubtedly be for the man who was attacked, and we are faced with the failure of most people to accept what to them is shockingly unbelievable. Even if these hurdles were finally overcome, the multiplicity of the crime would almost certainly lead to a verdict of *Not Guilty* by reason of insanity.

In short, a conviction of either of the murderers in the two stories is, for all practical purposes, extremely unlikely. And it is understandable why a police officer might hesitate to voice his suspicions, knowing the ultimate reaction and outcome.

Editor's afterword: *In other words, the real life possibilities of the situations presented in both these stories are even more shocking than the fictional ones. Take a look at the man across the way from you the next time you ride a bus. He may be a murderer!*





A Novelette

THICK sticky heat came gushing from the Indian Ocean, closed in on Ceylon, and it seemed to Clayton that he was the sole target. He sat at the bar of a joint called Kroner's on the Colombo waterfront, and tried vainly to cool himself with gin and ice. It was Saturday night and the place was mobbed, and most of them needed baths. Clayton told himself if he didn't get out soon, he'd suffocate. But he knew he couldn't walk out. If he walked out, he'd be killed.

It was a weird paradox. A man who feared violent death would never come near Kroner's, let alone sit at the bar with his back to the tables. The place was a hangout for agents who dealt in violence, a magnet for thugs and muggers and professional murderers. They'd tackle any job for money or its equivalent in opium, and because they had nothing to lose they were afraid of nothing. Except

The Blue Sweetheart

BY DAVID GOODIS

*A glittering stone and a beautiful blonde—and Hugen wanted them both;
wanted them badly enough to kill for them.*

one element. The element was Kroner.

And Kroner was Clayton's friend, the only friend he had. That was why he felt safe here. Two days ago he'd managed to sneak in from the interior of Ceylon, had told Kroner about the blue treasure, the huge sapphire he'd found in the earth. Kroner had smiled and said he already knew about it. This kind of news traveled fast in Colombo.

Kroner hadn't asked to see the sapphire. He wasn't interested in sapphires. He placed a premium on friendship, he always said, and his prime concern was the welfare of his friends. Built short and wide and completely bald, the fifty-year-old Dutchman was a quiet-spoken man whose sentimental nature was a soft veneer. Under it, there were rock-hard muscles and the ferocity of a water-buffalo.

He'd given Clayton a room upstairs, and promised to make arrangements for passage on the next available boat out of Colombo. Until that was accomplished, he emphasized, Clayton must stay here and not worry and not do anything foolish.

Clayton wondered if he could handle the latter item. In the course of his life he'd made countless impulsive moves, some of them absurdly foolish. Now, at twenty-nine, his appetite for danger was tempered with a grim hunger to stay alive.

He was a medium-sized man, built like a fast welterweight, the build

nicely balanced for power and agility. A long time back he'd boxed professionally, and his face showed it. But despite the marks, it was a face that women liked to look at. They didn't seem to mind the broken nose and the scar tissue above the eyes. And Alma used to put her lips against the scars, and when she did it, she purred. He was remembering the sound of it, the way she purred. His mouth hardened with bitter memory.

He leaned across the bar and told Kroner to sell him another drink. As Kroner poured the gin, a hand came down on Clayton's shoulder. It came down like a feather, settling gently. Clayton turned slowly on the bar stool and saw the shiny smiling face of the Englishman.

The Englishman's name was Dodsley and he was a greasy whiskered derelict of some forty-odd years. He was a crumpled slob who took opium but managed to control it enough so that he was coherent at intervals. Now his face showed his thoughts were in order and Clayton knew what was coming. Dodsley's profession was displayed in his glowing eyes. He was an agent for anyone who wished to obtain gems, whether it meant purchase, swindle or downright theft.

The Englishman went on smiling. It seemed he was carefully choosing his first words. He waited another moment, then said, "They say it's a very big stone. They tell me it's almost two hundred carats."

Clayton didn't say anything.

"May I see it?"

"No," Clayton said.

"I can't make an offer unless I see it."

"It isn't for sale," Clayton said. He turned to face the bar and focus on the gin.

He heard the Englishman breathing behind him, and then the voice saying, "You found the stone near Anuradhapura, at the Colonial mines. My client is part-owner of the mines. I think you know who my client is, and I'm sure you understand his business methods —"

"That's enough," Clayton cut in. Again he was facing the Englishman. "The stone is my property. I didn't find it in the mine area. I picked it up in the hills at least three miles away from their land holdings."

Dodsley shrugged. "There were witnesses."

"Of course there were witnesses. They flocked around like hungry hyenas. But they went away when I showed them the gun. It's a neat little gun. I always have it with me and I always keep it loaded."

"The gun is not important," Dodsley said. "This is a legal matter. They said you were working at the mines —"

Clayton was grinning and shaking his head. "I quit the mines two weeks before I found the stone. Got checking-out papers to prove it." The grin faded as he went on, "Just tell your client about the gun. Tell him I'm always ready to use it."

The Englishman looked up at the ceiling and sighed. It was a mixture of sad prophecy and ruthless pronouncement. It caused Clayton to stiffen, and he was thinking of Dodsley's client.

He was thinking of a man named Rudy Hagen. It was Hagen who'd booted him out of Colombo more than a year ago. And it was Hagen who'd taken Alma from him. The memory of it seared his brain.

Now it came back, cutting hard and deep. He was in Hagen's private office again in the warehouse on the waterfront. He was broken and bleeding at Hagen's feet. And Alma was in Hagen's arms, looking down at him as though he were mud. As they dragged him to the door to throw him out, he heard the laughter. He didn't feel the rough hands of Hagen's men. He felt only the ripping pain of hearing the laughter. It was like acid, and it came burning into him from Alma's lips.

He could hear it again in his brain. He quivered with rage. He was telling himself to leap off the stool and run out of here and race along the docks to Hagen's place, and let it happen any way it was going to happen. Just then he heard the soft whistle.

He moved his head and saw the warning gesture. It was Kroner's finger going from side to side. And Kroner's eyes were saying, "Don't do it, be sensible."

Clayton took a deep breath. He turned to Dodsley. His voice was

calm and level. "Tell Hagen to leave me alone and I'll leave him alone. I'm willing to forget what he did to me. All he did was take some little stones and a woman. As far as I'm concerned, *everything* he took was junk."

He shoved Dodsley and the Englishman bumped into a table where a bearded Hindu gave him another shove. It became a succession of shoves that sent Dodsley all the way to the door. Kroner was there at the door, waiting for him, smacking the back of his head to make the exit emphatic. Clayton tossed off the remainder of the gin and went up to his room.

The knocking was a parade of glimmering blue spheres bouncing in blackness. He opened his eyes and the spheres were gone but the blackness stayed there. Then he heard the knuckles rapping against the door.

The gun was under the mattress and he reached for it, found it, released the safety catch and quickly hauled himself out of bed.

Outside the room a voice said, "It's me, Kroner."

He switched on the light and opened the door. Kroner saw the gun in his hand and nodded approvingly.

Clayton yawned. "What time is it?"

"Past three. She's downstairs."

He stared at the Dutchman. He said, "Send her up." He said it automatically, without thinking.

Kroner sighed. He didn't say any-

thing. He waited there in the doorway. His eyes told Clayton it would be a serious mistake to let her enter this room.

Clayton's mouth hardened. He could feel the challenge of her presence on the floor below. He spoke louder. "You heard what I said. Send her up."

"Now?"

"Right now."

"Don't you want time to shave? Look at you. You aren't even dressed."

"The hell with that. She'll see me the way I am."

Kroner sighed again, backed out of the room, and closed the door. Clayton lit a cigarette and stood staring at himself in the wall mirror. His hair was a black storm on his head and he had a two-day growth on his face and all he wore was a pair of shorts. But then, still focusing on the mirror, he wasn't seeing his unkempt appearance. He was seeing something beyond the mirror. Again his brain made the tortuous journey along the paths of bitter memory.

It was three years ago and he was meeting her for the first time. They had a few drinks and then she told him to let it ride and forget about her. She said it was just a matter of cold cash and he didn't have it and that put him out of the picture.

But he knew she wasn't a professional, and he begged her to explain. So then she told him about it, the husband who'd been killed in the

Okinawa campaign, a series of hard knocks, one or two crackups and finally the decision to put money ahead of anything else.

And even though her eyes were saying it wasn't money now, he made up his mind to get the money. Then came two years of trying to get it, digging for sapphire in the hills, coming back with empty hands. But his arms were never empty. Alma was always there to meet him. They never talked about money.

Then, a year ago, he'd come back from the hills with some stones of fairly decent size. It wasn't a fortune, but it meant enough money so he could ask her to marry him. On the night of his arrival in Colombo, she wasn't in the bus depot to meet him. He waited an hour, two hours and she didn't show. He called her apartment and she wasn't there and his eyes had hardened as he thought of Rudy Hagen.

Hagen had always been in the picture, flitting in and out of it like the shadow of a vulture. And now Hagen was saving him the trouble of walking to the waterfront and moving in for a showdown.

A Rolls Royce arrived at the depot and a few men got out and told him he was wanted in Hagen's office and they'd be glad to drive him there. He took one look at their faces and realized that the news of his sapphires had preceded him to Colombo. He took another look and knew there was no use. He shrugged and climbed into the Rolls Royce.

Hagen made it brief and blunt. The gems were Hagen's property. The stones had been found on land holdings of which Hagen was part owner. Clayton wasn't listening. He was looking at Alma. She had her hand on Hagen's shoulder, and Hagen's arm was around her waist.

When he lunged at Hagen, it had nothing to do with the sapphires. And later, when he was tossed out of the office, a sack of bleeding meat, he didn't hear the clinking sound of the stones in Hagen's hand. All he heard was a woman's laughter, a disdainful laugh that told him he'd been played for a sucker.

Now, a year later, he stood before the mirror and saw his lips moving and heard himself saying, "God damn her."

But when the door opened, his body seemed to melt and the fire came into his eyes. It was the fire that always leaped up at the sight of her.

She was dazzling. She had the kind of face that couldn't be captured with camera or paint-brush. Only the living flesh could show the perfection of eyes and nose and lips. Her hair was platinum, and her skin had the softness of camellia petals. The slender elegance of her body was sheathed in pale green satin, cut low in front to display the cleavage of her breasts. She had exquisite breasts. Everything about her was perfect, her shoulders and her belly and her hips and her thighs.

He was making an effort to steady

himself. He tried not to look at her. He said, "You here on business?"

"Strictly."

"If that's a business outfit you're wearing, I got a few dollars ain't busy."

She didn't even flinch. She was like a clever boxer neatly slipping a right-hand smash to the jaw. "I'll do the buying," she said very softly. She helped herself to one of his cigarettes, lit it and took a long drag and let it go way down. As it came up and out of her lips, she was smiling at him. "May I see the stone?"

"No." Then he looked at her. "I didn't show it to Dodsley and I won't show it to you. And tell Hagen to stop sending representatives. If he wants to know what it looks like, I'll let him see it. But he'll have to phone for an appointment."

She was quiet for some moments. When she spoke, her voice was calm and level. "Let's leave Hagen out of this. The only buyer I'm representing is myself."

"You?" He was caught off balance. But then his eyes narrowed and he said, "Where's your money?"

She was carrying a small kidskin handbag. Her fingers tapped the side of it. "In here," she murmured. "I think it's enough for a down payment."

Then she opened the bag and took out a roll of bills. They were thousand-dollar bills and as she leafed through the roll, he counted twenty of them.

His eyes remained narrow and he

said, "The full price is three hundred thousand."

She smiled dimly. "Rather expensive." Then the smile went away and she said, "I'll have the balance here tomorrow."

The roll of bills was extended toward him but he made no move to take it. He was watching her eyes. Finally he shook his head slowly and said, "No sale."

"Why not?"

He laughed at her. "You think I'm stupid or something? You give me the twenty, I give you the stone, and then you hand it over to Hagen. That's as far as it would go." The laugh became sour and jagged. "Tell Hagen to think of a better scheme."

"This isn't a scheme, and Hagen knows nothing about it." She took a deep breath. "I'll show you Hagen's scheme. Here's the method he wants me to use."

She reached into the handbag and took out a small automatic revolver.

Clayton tensed himself.

But the gun wasn't pointed at him. She held it loosely, did nothing more than display it, then let it fall into the handbag. She inserted the roll of bills in the bag, closed the bag and tossed it onto the bed. In almost the same gesture she pointed toward the window, indicating that Clayton should take a look outside.

He hurried across the room and peered through the blinds. Outside a man was waiting in the street below. He saw the greasy face and sloppy white suit of Dodsley.

He turned and looked at her.

Her voice was low. "It would have been so easy," she said. "The gun would have forced you to give me the stone. But Hagen's plan went further than that. He wanted me to shoot you dead, then go to the window and throw the stone to Dodsley. I'd be waiting here when the police arrived. My dress would be torn and I'd tell them I did it only to protect myself. And of course I'd know nothing about a sapphire."

Clayton was quiet for some moments. Finally, he said, "An old idea, but a good one. And I'm sure it would have worked. Why didn't you use it?"

Her eyes tried to penetrate the stoniness of his face. "Can't you answer that?"

"There's more than one answer. You're a shrewd operator."

"At times," she admitted. "At other times I'm a woman."

She was moving toward him. His brain reeled with the thought *I want her, I want her*. And then the ice-cold thought, *I don't trust her*. And finally the snarling decision, *Damn her, I can play this just as cheap as she can*.

The platinum hair came nearer. He stood there waiting, watching the parted lips, watching her tongue moisten them. He felt the mild caress of her breath against his face, and suddenly he found her in his arms, and her lips crushed against his mouth. His hands followed the smooth curve of her back, and he breathed

deeply of her hair, drugged with the nearness of her. He didn't see the clock that said *Now* and the bed that said *Here*. He was aware only of her closed eyes, the swell of her breasts against his chest, the warmth of her. He was swept outward and away from the boundaries of reality and yet somehow he knew this wasn't a dream, it was something he had waited for and hungered for and it was happening . . .

The warmth left him too soon. He felt the steely grin forming on his lips again. He watched her adjust her skirt, smoothing it over her hips, watched the long flash of thigh as she got to her feet.

"Before you go downstairs, you better fix your mouth," he said. "You need new lipstick."

It wasn't the words. It was the look on his face. She stared at him incredulously. "Is . . . is that all you can say? After . . . after . . . haven't I proved . . . ?" She stopped, choking on the words.

Clayton said, "You've proved you're a filthy tramp. Now get out."

"Clayton —" She sobbed it.

He had turned away. "Go on, get the hell out of here."

He was facing a wall. He heard her moving toward the door, and the door opening and closing. Minutes passed, and he stood there gazing vacantly at the wall. Gradually he began to think about taking a bath. He felt dirty and he told himself he really needed a bath.

Showered and shaved and wearing clean linen and a freshly pressed suit, he stood at the bar and watched Kroner tilting the bottle. Kroner poured with a seemingly clumsy motion but the gin came up to the edge of the glass and stopped right there. Clayton reached for the glass, lifted it, spilled some of the gin, and shot the rest down his throat. He extended the empty glass and mumbled, "Another."

"You can't hold another."

"I said give me another."

Kroner poured it. They were alone in the place except for two drunken natives who had fallen asleep and were stretched out on the floor like a couple of dead men. A dirty-faced clock above the bar indicated twenty minutes past four. The small window behind the bar showed that it was still dark outside.

"Almost morning," Kroner commented. He watched Clayton. "You want me to help you upstairs?"

"I'm not going upstairs," Clayton emptied the glass. He looked at the Dutchman. "How much have I had?"

"Plenty," Kroner said. "It's a wonder your legs can hold you up."

"Let me buy you one."

"My dear Clayton, you know I never touch liquor."

"You mean liquor never touches you. Nothing ever touches you."

Kroner looked hurt. "Friendship touches me. It means more than jewels to me. I'm thinking only of your welfare and I beg you to take

my advice. Go up to your room and stay there. And tomorrow, if I can manage it, you'll be on a boat."

Clayton wasn't listening. He was reaching toward the wide pocket of his jacket and feeling the bulk of the revolver. His fingers went up along the short barrel, onto the chamber and past the trigger-guard and finally grasped the thick butt. Then he let go of the revolver and took his hand from the pocket. He looked to see if his hand was shaking. He saw that his fingers were steady. He said, "The eyes always tell the truth." And then, slowly and softly, "I'm going out for a walk. I want to take a look at something."

He moved away from the bar, heading toward the door leading to the street. When he arrived at the door, Kroner was there to block his path. The Dutchman was a wide thick wall of beef, the arms spread out, the fat face glimmering with sweat.

"My friend —" Kroner pleaded.

Clayton smiled wearily. "You're in my way."

"My very dear friend," Kroner said. "Please try to be logical. If you walk out of here, you'll be playing into Hagen's hands. His men are posted all along the waterfront, waiting for you —"

Clayton went on smiling, his eyes aiming past the Dutchman and focused on the door.

"Please," Kroner said thickly. "The important thing is to stay alive."

Then they were looking at each other and Clayton was saying, "I don't have time to write out a will. But if I don't come back, the sapphire belongs to you. You'll find it in a cardboard box stuffed in the head-side of the mattress."

He took a step toward the door. Kroner did not budge. Kroner said, "I'm very sorry, but I cannot allow you to leave."

Clayton shrugged. And he sighed. Then rather gently he pushed at Kroner's chest with his left hand, chopped short and hard with his right and caught the Dutchman on the jaw. Kroner sagged and went to the floor, stretched out prone and motionless.

Clayton opened the door and walked out. He was met with a flood of very hot and syrupy air coming in from the Indian Ocean.

Lights blinked against the oily black surface of the Colombo harbor. On the waterfront it was quiet except for the steady lapping of little waves coming in to caress the docks. Clayton moved close to the piers, his head working like something in a socket, his eyes studying the darkness that seemed to revolve around him.

Then he was in a narrow alley between a splintered pier and the thick concrete walls of a British cotton warehouse. He came out of the alley and started a turn that would take him toward Hagen's private office. There was a light in the window,

and the light seemed to beckon and he hurried forward. He'd taken only a few footsteps when he heard the sound behind him.

He pivoted and stared and saw them. Two of them. They were coming in fast, and as they came closer he saw the mashed noses and thick lips of dock ruffians who made their living with their muscles and their twisted brains. One of them had a knife and the other carried a short club. Clayton took the gun out of his pocket, released the safety catch and aimed the gun and then decided to try it without bullets. The bullets would make too much noise. It would bring Hagen and his men out of the office, and that would ruin it. He told himself he hadn't come here to fight or kill, but just to learn something, to prove something to himself.

The thugs hadn't seen the gun, they were concentrating on their own target. As they lunged, Clayton sidestepped and brought the gun-butt crashing against the skull of the man nearest him. The man went down like a toppled statue. The other man let out a curse and forgot Hagen's orders not to use the knife for killing, and slashed the blade toward Clayton's throat. Clayton stepped back, wielding the gun so that the butt hit the man's wrist. There was the cracking sound of splintered bone. The man opened his mouth to yell, and Clayton rushed in and used the gun like a hammer on the man's mouth. The

man went to his knees, spitting blood and teeth and choking on more blood. Clayton gave him a rap on the temple that knocked him flat and put him to sleep.

The sign above the lit window read *Rudolph Hagen Co., Ltd.* Under the printed words there was a painted symbol of a jeweler's eye-piece, framed in the curving lines of elephant-tusks. This meant that Rudy Hagen was a dealer in gems and ivory and any kind of treasure he could get his hands on. Hagen had extremely large hands and Clayton was looking at them now.

He was crouched at the wall and looking through the window and focusing on Hagen's hands resting on a teakwood table. The thick fingers were stretched, showing the two rings, a large cat's eye and a larger opal. Clayton studied the hands for some moments, and then his gaze went up to the face.

Hagen had brutish good looks, the heavy features well-shaped and balanced, the light brown hair thick and neatly brushed. He was a tall stoutish man in his early forties, in splendid physical condition except for the red complexion that told of too much drinking. He was drinking now. He was taking sips from a high-ball glass as he smiled at Alma. She sat facing him and seemed to be looking past him. The drink in front of her was untouched.

The window was open at the bottom but Clayton didn't hear any sound coming from the room. It was

an extremely ornate room. A Kerman rug covered the entire floor, and the walls were decorated with silk-screen paintings. On the far side of the room, placed there like a weapon pointing at the world, was Hagen's strongvault, a block of polished black iron with a silver combination-dial and handle. Clayton thought of the countless men who'd been cheated and robbed and sometimes slaughtered to feed the maw of the strongvault. His eyes were dull with hate and for a moment he wanted to leap through the window and use the gun.

He pulled brakes on the impulse, and as he did it, he heard Hagen saying, "What's the matter with your drink?"

"Nothing," Alma said. "I just don't feel like drinking."

"That's unusual," Hagen remarked. He took a long gulp from the high-ball glass.

Then they were quiet again but Clayton saw the way Hagen was smiling at her and the way she tried to keep her eyes off Hagen's face. Some moments passed, and then Dodsley entered the room. The Englishman placed a fresh drink on the table in front of Hagen, and in that instant the two of them traded a glance. Clayton saw that and then he switched his stare to Alma. She had stiffened just a little. As Dodsley walked out of the room, Hagen went on smiling at her. She took a very deep breath, as though her lungs were straining for air.

Hagen stood up and began pacing the floor between the teakwood table and the strongvault. He walked very slowly, his head lowered contemplatively, like a man rehearsing a speech. He stopped at the table, folded his arms and looked down at Alma and now he wasn't smiling.

He gestured toward the high-ball glass she hadn't touched. "Drink it," he said. "You're always better company after a few drinks."

She didn't look at him. She stared straight ahead. "I told you I'm not drinking."

"It's a pity to waste the whiskey," he murmured. "Thirty-year-old Scotch. Besides, it's bad luck to fill a glass and then not even taste it." His mouth tightened. "Take one sip. Just one."

"No." She looked at him. "And stop coaxing me."

"I'm not coaxing you, my dear. I'm telling you." Hagen took hold of the high-ball glass and lifted it toward her lips. She drew her head back and pushed the glass aside and some of the contents spilled on the table.

Outside the window, Clayton watched. His hands had a tight grip on the lower edge of the window-frame.

He saw the angry flush on Hagen's face. He saw Alma getting up and he heard her saying, "It's very late, and I need sleep. I'm going back to my apartment."

She started past Hagen, but he grabbed her wrist and held her there

and said, "I didn't tell you to go. You'll wait until I tell you."

"Let go, Rudy." She made a move to pull away.

Hagen smiled at her and put more pressure on her wrist.

"Let go," She said it very quietly. "Let go, damn you."

"That's more like it," Hagen said, and he released her wrist. "At least, when you're angry, I can talk to you."

Alma went back to the table and stood looking down at the high-ball glass. Almost half of the whiskey had been spilled but the remainder was a liquid magnet that pulled her hand toward the glass. She took hold of the glass as though it contained some bitter medicine that wasn't easy to take. And then, with one long convulsive gulp, she drained the glass.

"Want another?" Hagen asked.

She shook her head. She was staring down at the polished surface of the teakwood table. The glimmering wood was like a mirror and she was seeing herself in it and hating what she saw.

She had her back turned to Hagen and he came toward her and put his hand on her shoulders. She squirmed away. Hagen's face darkened again and he muttered, "What's wrong with you?"

"I want to be left alone. I told you I was tired."

"Look at me." Hagen's tone was a mixture of seething anger and frantic pleading.

She still kept her back to him.

"You can't even look at me."

Hagen spoke through his teeth. His lips trembled. Then, with an effort, he controlled himself and said more calmly, "I'm trying to reason with you, Alma. I'm hoping you'll change your attitude and let me talk to you."

"All right," she said. "I'm listening."

But Hagen, standing behind her, couldn't see what Clayton saw. She had her eyes closed and her throat muscles contracted and she was trying to steady herself.

Then she turned slowly to face Hagen and he was quiet for some moments and finally he said, "I don't like the way things are going between us. Day after day it's like a stalemate. It's as if we're sitting playing chess. It's just a game, and I'm tired of it."

"What do you want, Rudy?"

"You. All of you."

"That wasn't in the contract."

"The hell with the contract." He said it loudly. "I've loved you ever since we first met."

"What do you know about love?" she asked.

"I'm flesh and blood," he shouted. "I need something more than a pretty toy to play with. I need real affection. And warmth. And happiness."

She was looking at the heavy safe in the corner. "There's your happiness."

"Is that a complaint?" He stabbed

it at her. "You're a fine one to complain. You can't even play it straight with the man who pays your bills."

She stood rigid, not saying anything.

Hagen's voice was a blade going in deeper. "You think I'm blind or something? You think I believed one word of what you told me about Clayton? You said he took the gun out of your hand. I say you're a rotten liar."

She started to turn away. Hagen grabbed her arms and held her and forced her to look at him.

"Liar," Hagen said. "You've been giving me a lie from the very beginning. You've been cheating me and playing me for a fool. And every time I held you in my arms and you closed your eyes, you were seeing another man. You were seeing Clayton."

She was trying to twist away. Hagen tightened his grip on her arms.

"Now you'll tell me the truth," he shouted. "You'll admit it's been Clayton all along. Let me hear you say it. You'll say it if I have to choke it from your mouth —"

His hands went up to her throat. She let out a strangled cry. Hagen went on squeezing as she sagged to her knees. His teeth showed in a crazy grimace and he didn't know or care that he was forcing the life from her body.

And then the window went all the way up and Clayton leaped into the room. As he rushed at Hagen, his

thoughts had nothing to do with strategy or tactics or remembering the gun in his pocket. He lunged like a wild animal and Hagen heard him coming, looked up and gaped at him and let go of Alma. She fell to the floor, gasping for breath. Hagen instinctively raised the big hands and clenched them and braced himself to meet the attack.

Clayton came in like a maddened bull. He threw both fists at Hagen's face, stepped back as Hagen ducked low and tried to hold, then used his right hand like a cleaver and sliced a line of red running harsh and wide and wet above Hagen's left eye.

Hagen groaned and made another attempt to hold on, and Clayton stepped to the side, speared the eye again, threw an uppercut that exploded on Hagen's chin. The big man went crashing into the teakwood table, sailing over it as it toppled to the floor. Clayton circled the table and moved in for the finish.

But Hagen had something left and got up fast and grabbed him as he lunged. Hagen held his arms, lifted him, and butted him in the stomach. Then he was hurled to the floor and kicked hard in the ribs. He tried to rise and Hagen kicked him again. He made a grab for Hagen's ankle, found it and yanked with all his might and Hagen went down. He threw himself at Hagen and landed on top. He hauled off to collect all the power in his arm for the final smash. But he didn't have time to send it in.

A door opened and four men came rushing into the room. As they closed in on Clayton, he remembered the gun in his pocket, reached for it, then realized it was a little late in the evening for the gun. The men had him flat on his face with one arm pulled high up between his shoulder blades. A heavy shoe crashed against his jaw and as he fell into a red-streaked fog he wryly told himself it was Hagen's night.

The fog didn't last long. Within a few minutes he was able to get his eyes in focus, and from the floor he obtained a clear view of what was taking place in the room. He saw Hagen seated at the table and dabbing a handkerchief against the bloodied brow. Dodsley was applying a strip of gauze-and-adhesive to the side of Hagen's mouth. The other four men were sitting around with cigarettes and glasses and waiting for further orders. Alma stood rigidly against the wall, staring at the teakwood table. The gun was on the table. Hagen's hand moved idly toward it and picked it up and gestured with it.

The gesture told Clayton to get up from the floor and sit at the table. He got up, and the gun pointed at his chest.

Hagen said, "I think maybe I'll do it."

"If you do," he said, "you'll have to travel."

Hagen smiled. "I don't think so. I'm a respected man in this community. As far as the police are con-

cerned, I'm the owner of a legitimate enterprise. I have the privilege of shooting any thief who tries to ransack my office."

Clayton copied the big man's smile. "Why would I want to do that? I'm a rich man in my own right. Everybody knows about the stone. They know how big it is and how much it's worth."

Hagen frowned thoughtfully. "True," he murmured. "Quite true." Then he was smiling again. "Let's talk about that. Let's talk sapphire."

"No deal."

"It's got to be a deal," Hagen said. "Name your price." And then he glanced at Alma and said, "It doesn't have to be money. Besides, you're in no position to bargain."

Clayton looked at her. He saw the stiffening of her body. He said to her, "Are you willing?"

She didn't reply. Her face was expressionless.

Every fibre of him strained toward her, and he spoke thickly, saying, "It's you in exchange for the sapphire."

Hagen was laughing softly. "Let the lady make up her own mind. After all, it's her decision."

She parted her lips to make the reply. Clayton felt the pounding of his heart and he couldn't breathe as he waited to hear the sound of her voice. He saw the glow in her eyes and he almost leaped up, knowing that now he could take her in his arms and have what he wanted more than anything. But all at once the

glow went out of her eyes, and she wasn't even looking at him. His veins froze as he saw her moving toward Hagen.

She stood beside Hagen and there was a thin smile on her lips as she put her hand on the big man's shoulder. Her fingers played with the expensive fabric of his suit. "It's a nice suit," she murmured. "It's silk, isn't it?" She aimed the smile at Clayton. "I like silk. I like the feel of it. I wouldn't settle for anything less."

"Smart girl," Hagen murmured. He took her hand and kissed her fingers. She fondled him, slowly curving her body to sit in his lap.

Clayton lowered his head and felt the pain lacing through him. On the level of sanity he called himself a moon-maddened idiot, craving something that was worthless. And yet he was torn with yearning, and the core of the wound was a horrible sense of futility and loss.

And all that remained was a shred of consoling thought as he remembered the sapphire. It lifted him just a little to know that Hagen would never get the stone.

He heard the sound of a door, and then a voice. It was the voice of Kroner. He blinked a few times and told himself he was hearing things, he was letting himself go crazy. He looked up and his widened eyes saw the Dutchman.

He stared at the cardboard box in Kroner's fat hands. He saw Kroner moving toward the table, placing the box on the table and grinning at

Hagen and saying, "Open it. You'll see the biggest and the finest."

Hagen's face was wet with perspiration as he opened the box. His fingers went in like hungry fangs, and came out clutching the huge chunk of dull blue stone. He let out a gasp and for a moment it almost seemed he wanted to cram the gem into his mouth and make it a part of his insides.

"Look at this thing," Hagen cried. "Just look at it." He held it up to the light. He spoke to it, saying, "Oh you sweetheart. You great big blue sweetheart."

"Like it?" Kroner murmured.

"It's my baby," Hagen exulted.

"Good," Kroner said. "Now let's talk business."

Clayton glared at the Dutchman. "You talk as if it's your stone."

"It is." Kroner was grinning. "Didn't you will it to me? I knew you wouldn't come out of here alive."

Then it was hate coming from Clayton's eyes as he shouted, "You double-crossing bastard."

"Please," Kroner murmured. "I beg you, do not misunderstand my intentions."

Clayton studied the Dutchman's face. And suddenly he realized the truth of it, the absolute truth, that Kroner's purpose was founded on pure honor and integrity. He knew that Kroner had come here in a desperate effort to save him from death. The Dutchman was gambling on Hagen's mad craving for the big blue stone, and hoping that a finan-

cial transaction would settle the matter and prevent a killing.

Kroner was looking at Hagen and saying, "Make me an offer."

Hagen didn't seem to hear. He was fully occupied with feasting his eyes on the stone. He seemed to have forgotten the gun in his other hand. And he paid no attention to Alma, who still sat in his lap, her arm around his shoulder and her fingers caressing the side of his face. He seemed to feel nothing, see nothing, know nothing but the big blue gem that glittered in his palm.

"It's flawless," Hagen said ecstatically. "I don't need an eye-piece to tell me that. It's flawless and it's absolutely priceless. There isn't another like it in the world." There was fever in his eyes and mania in his voice as he cried, "Now I own the biggest and the best."

"You don't own it yet," Kroner said quietly. "I'm still waiting to hear your offer."

"My offer?" Hagen blinked a few times. He seemed to be coming out of a blue mist, a vapor that drifted up from the sapphire. His eyes narrowed, a hard smile curved his lips, and he said, "You're a fool, Kroner. Can't you see the stone in my hand? You've delivered the merchandise and now it's mine."

Kroner's face stiffened. "You imply that I'm not to be paid?"

Hagen laughed lightly. "You'll be paid," he said. "I'll even give you a pen to sign the receipt. It's a special kind of pen. It writes under water."

The Dutchman winced. He gazed helplessly at Clayton. Then he shook his head sadly and said, "It was too much to hope for. But at least I can tell myself that I tried."

"You tried hard." Clayton's throat was thick with feeling. "You're a real friend."

"I'm an imbecile," the Dutchman said. "I made the mistake of thinking that Mr. Hagen was a human being. My stupidity in that matter cannot be measured." He shrugged and then he smiled dimly at Clayton, and his eyes said, *Let's see if we can take it without flinching.*

Clayton returned the smile. An instant later he saw Hagen making a gesture that told his four men to get busy. He saw them reaching into their pockets and taking out the knives. In his mind he could see the process that would soon take place, the quick and efficient slaughtering, the blades slicing his flesh and Kroner's flesh. And after that, the weights attached to the ankles and the two corpses hurled into the harbor where the water was forty or seventy or ninety feet deep, anyway deep enough to hide all traces of a wet burial.

Without words he was saying good-bye to Kroner. And then, for some unaccountable reason, he decided on a silent farewell to Alma. He looked at her and he saw her sitting there in Hagen's lap.

His lips curled just a little to show his defiance and contempt. But then he saw the look in her eyes, the look

that told him to keep his gaze focused on her face, to wait for a signal. He couldn't be wrong this time.

A moment later she gave him the signal. It was a wink. In almost the same moment she made a grab for the gun in Hagen's hand. Clayton lunged across the table, seeing the gun pointed to the ceiling as Alma twisted Hagen's wrist.

In a fraction of a second, Hagen's finger pulled the trigger, and the bullet went straight up, and Clayton grabbed for the gun but couldn't get it because Hagen freed his wrist from Alma's grasp and the motion caused the gun to fall out of his hand and off the table. The four men were lunging with their knives and Clayton dived to the floor, and made another grab for the gun.

But now Dodsley was there to kick the gun aside. Dodsley reached down to pick up the gun and received a hammer blow in the stomach from Kroner's fist. Then Kroner made a try for the gun and Hagen came leaping in to give the Dutchman a shoulder in the ribs that sent him to his knees.

Hagen kept on going, getting closer to the gun, getting very close and then reaching the gun, grabbing it, aiming it at Clayton's face. Clayton's arm went out like a piston, his hand closed on the barrel, jerked it up as Hagen yanked on the trigger. Another bullet went into the ceiling. A third bullet went into a wall.

They were still grappling for the gun when a fourth bullet plowed into the floor. Then Clayton had the gun and the fifth bullet went into Hagen's heart.

Clayton showed the gun to Dodsley and the four men. They didn't need to be told to drop their knives. Kroner was standing motionless and taking deep breaths.

And Alma was at the phone, calling the police.

It was an hour later and the police had departed with a corpse and five handcuffed men. Kroner went along with them to tell the full story. Clayton stood on the pier and watched the police-car moving away.

The first grey ribbons of dawn were sliding across the sky as he turned slowly and moved toward the woman who had her back to him and was looking out at the dark water which was reflected in his eyes.

As he came up to her, she faced him, and he saw the sadness in her eyes.

She made no attempt to hide her feelings. She just stood there silently.

He said quietly, "It's a complicated game, isn't it?"

She nodded slowly. "We make it complicated," she managed to say in a quiet tone.

"Sometimes we're forced to," he said. "For example, a certain woman I know. She sat on the lap of a man she hated. And all she was thinking

about was the gun in his hand. A gun that could get me."

She nodded again. And then she was trying to control her emotions, trying to speak calmly and objectively, as she said,

"A year ago I stood with my arm around Hagen and I laughed at you. If I hadn't laughed, if I'd let him know what I really felt, he would have killed you. Tonight it was the same routine. I was doing the only thing I could to keep you alive."

He was quiet for some moments. Then he said, "A few hours ago we were in my room. Why didn't you tell me then? What stopped you from telling me?"

"I didn't think it would get across. The only time it gets across is when it's all there, and there's nothing else, no doubts and no contradictions." Her eyes were clear and steady.

"You're right about that," he murmured. "I wouldn't have believed you. I was too angry, too bitter, too much of a damn fool."

"No," she said. "You were right in thinking that I came to get the sapphire. The gun, of course, was Hagen's plan. My plan was my money, every cent I have, twenty thousand dollars. But it wasn't quite enough."

Clayton smiled dimly. "That was just the down payment. You said you could bring the balance."

She copied the smile. "The strong-vault in Hagen's office. I know the combination."

She said slowly, "I meant it when I promised to bring the rest of the money."

"And you'd have kept your promise. And then Hagen would have found out. Chances are, he'd have killed you. Did you figure that one out?"

She didn't reply. But he already knew the answer.

He said, "You were willing to die for me."

Her head was lowered and she said,

"You make it sound very noble." Then she looked up. "Remember, I'm just a blonde tramp with a weakness for rich men."

He reached into his pocket and took out the sapphire. "Look at this." He was grinning. "It'll bring a lot of money."

"Yes, I know. She was drifting into his arms, ignoring the gleam of the big blue gem. "And please don't show me the money. All I want is the man."



Everybody's Watching Me



BY MICKEY SPILLANE

The cards are on the table as Joe Boyle fights his way to the end of the line. And waiting there with murder in his fist — Vetter!

PART IV

What has happened before: When young Joe Boyle is paid to deliver a note reading "Cooley is dead. Now my fine fat louse, I'm going to spill your guts all over your own floor," and signed Vetter, he finds himself in the middle of a murderous rat race. Vetter is a mysterious killer believed to be a friend of Cooley, unknown otherwise except for the fact that he's responsible for the death of many hoodlums. Renzo, recipient of the note, local big-time racketeer, has Joe beaten and then tailed in an effort to locate Vetter. Phil Carboy, a rival racketeer, learning Vetter is in town, pays Joe to finger Vetter the next time he appears. Even the police in the form of Detective Sergeant Gonzales, want Vetter. From Bucky Edwards, Joe's newspaperman friend, and from Captain Gerot of the police, Joe pieces together the theory that Cooley may have been rubbed for narcotic connections or because he knew too much about the local gang setup. Helen Troy, featured dancer at Renzo's club, befriends Joe. Falling in love with her, he gives her money to leave Renzo and then goes to keep a rendezvous with a stranger who tells him that Cooley was killed because he knew the boys were slipping in drugs

through a new door, and stole a \$4,000,000 shipment from them. Joe calls Gonzales to tell him Carboy paid him big money to finger Vetter, and that Carboy's men are now tailing Joe. He gets Jack Cooley's last address from Bucky Edwards, dodges Carboy's tails and goes to Cooley's rooming house. He learns that the dead man used to go fishing often, using a place called Gulley's for his meetings with other men. Joe calls Gerot to learn that Helen has been shot at and is now missing. Outside his house, he meets the stranger again, and the stranger kills one of Joe's tails. Joe runs back to his room, finds Helen there. She'd been waiting for a train when the shots came at her. Acting on a tip from the stranger, Joe asks Helen what her connection with the dead Cooley was. She tells him Cooley was blackmailing Renzo. She also tells him that Cooley left a quarter pound of heroin with her — which she threw down a sewer. Joe feels he is now ready to go out and wind up the whole thing.

I WOKE UP just past noon. Helen was still asleep, restlessly tossing in some dream. The sheet had slipped down to her waist, and everytime she moved, her body rippled with sinuous grace. I stood looking at her for a long time, my eyes devouring her, every muscle in my body wanting her. There were other things to do, and I cursed those other things and set out to do them.

When I knew the landlady was gone I made a trip downstairs to her ice box and lifted enough for a quick meal. I had to wake Helen up to eat, then sat back with an old magazine to let the rest of the day pass by. At seven we made the first move. It was a nice simple little thing that put the whole neighborhood in an uproar for a half hour but gave us a chance to get out without being spotted.

All I did was call the fire department and tell them there was a gas leak in one of the tenements. They did the rest. Besides holding everybody back from the area they evacuated a whole row of houses, includ-

ing us and while they were trying to run down the false alarm we grabbed a cab and got out.

Helen asked, "Where to?"

"A place called Gulley's. It's a stop for the fishing boats. You know it?"

"I know it." She leaned back against the cushions. "It's a tough place to be. Jack took me out there a couple of times."

"He did? Why?"

"Oh, we ate, then he met some friends of his. We were there when the place was raided. Gulley was selling liquor after closing hours. Good thing Jack had a friend on the force."

"Who was that?"

"Some detective with a Mexican name."

"Gonzales," I said.

She looked at me. "That's right." She frowned slightly. "I didn't like him at all."

That was a new angle. One that didn't fit in. Jack with a friend on the force. I handed Helen a cigarette, lit it and sat back with mine.

It took a good hour to reach the place and at first glance it didn't seem worth the ride. From the highway the road weaved out onto a sand spit and in the shadows you could see the parked cars and occasionally couples in them. Here and there along the road the lights of the car picked up the glint of beer cans and empty bottles. I gave the cabbie an extra five and told him to wait and when we went down the gravel path, he pulled it under the trees and switched off his lights.

Gulley's was a huge shack built on the sand with a porch extending out over the water. There wasn't a speck of paint on the weather-racked framework and over the whole place the smell of fish hung like a blanket. It looked like a creep joint until you turned the corner and got a peek at the nice modern dock setup he had and the new addition on the side that probably made the place the yacht club's slumming section. If it didn't have anything else it had atmosphere. We were right on the tip of the peninsular that jutted out from the mainland and like the sign said, it was the last chance for the boats to fill up with the bottled stuff before heading out to deep water.

I told Helen to stick in the shadows of the hedge row that ran around the place while I took a look around, and though she didn't like it, she melted back into the brush. I could see a couple of figures on the porch, but they were talking too low for me

to hear what was going on. Behind the bar that ran across the main room inside, a flat-faced fat guy leaned over reading the paper with his ears pinned inside a headset. Twice he reached back, frowning and fiddled with a radio under the counter. When the phone rang he scowled again, slipped off the headset and said, "Gulley speaking. Yeah. Okay. So-long."

When he went back to his paper I crouched down under the rows of windows and eased around the side. The sand was a thick carpet that silenced all noise and the gentle lapping of the water against the docks covered any other racket I could make. I was glad to have it that way too. There were guys spotted around the place that you couldn't see until you looked hard and they were just lounging. Two were by the building and the other two at the foot of the docks, edgy birds who lit occasional cigarettes and shifted around as they smoked them. One of them said something and a pair of them swung around to watch the twin beams of a car coming up the highway. I looked too, saw them turn in a long arc then cut straight for the shack.

One of the boys started walking my way, his feet squeaking in the dry sand. I dropped back around the corner of the building, watched while he pulled a bottle out from under the brush, then started back the way I had come.

The car door slammed. A pair of

voices mixed in an argument and another one cut them off. When I heard it I could feel my lips peel back and I knew that if I had a knife in my fist and Mark Renzo passed by me in the dark, whatever he had for supper would spill all over the ground. There was another voice, swearing at something. Johnny. Nice, gentle Johnny who was going to cripple me for life.

I wasn't worrying about Helen because she wouldn't be sticking her neck out. I was hoping hard that my cabbie wasn't reading any paper by his dome light and when I heard the boys reach the porch and go in, I let my breath out hardly realizing that my chest hurt from holding it in so long.

You could hear their hellos from inside, muffled sounds that were barely audible. I had maybe a minute to do what I had to do and didn't waste any time doing it. I scuttled back under the window that was at one end of the bar, had time to see Gulley shaking hands with Renzo over by the door, watched him close and lock it and while they were still far enough away not to notice the movement, slid the window up an inch and flattened against the wall.

They did what I expected they'd do. I heard Gulley invite them to the bar for a drink and set out the glasses. Renzo said, "Good stuff."

"Only the best. You know that."

Johnny said, "Sure. You treat your best customers right."

Bottle and glasses clinked again for another round. Then the headset that was under the bar started clicking. I took a quick look, watched Gulley pick it up, slap one carpiece against his head and jot something down on a pad.

Renzo said, "She getting in without trouble?"

Gulley set the headset down and leaned across the bar. He looked soft, but he'd been around a long time and not even Renzo was playing any games with him. "Look," he said, "You got your end of the racket. Keep out of mine. You know?"

"Getting tough, Gulley?"

I could almost hear Gulley smile. "Yeah. Yeah, in case you want to know. You damn well better blow off to them city lads, not me."

"Ease off," Renzo told him. He didn't sound rough any more. "Heard a load was due in tonight."

"You hear too damn much."

"It didn't come easy. I put out a bundle for the information. You know why?" Gulley didn't say anything. Renzo said, "I'll tell you why. I need that stuff. You know why?"

"Tough. Too bad. You know. What you want is already paid for and is being delivered. You ought to get your head out of your whoosis."

"Gulley . . ." Johnny said really quiet. "We ain't kidding. We need that stuff. The big boys are getting jumpy. They think we pulled a fast one. They don't like it. They don't like it so bad maybe they'll send a

crew down here to straighten everything out and you may get straightened too."

Inside Gulley's feet were nervous on the floorboards. He passed in front of me once, his hands busy wiping glasses. "You guys are nuts. Carboy paid for this load. So I should stand in the middle?"

"Maybe it's better than standing in front of us," Johnny said.

"You got rocks. Phil's out of the local stuff now. He's got a pretty big outfit."

"Just peanuts, Gulley, just peanuts."

"Not any more. He's moving in since you dumped the big deal."

Gulley's feet stopped moving. His voice had a whisper in it. "So you were big once. Now I see you sliding. The big boys are going for bargains and they don't like who can't deliver, especially when it's been paid for. That was one big load. It was special. So you dumped it. Phil's smart enough to pick it up from there and now he may be top dog. I'm not in the middle. Not without an answer to Phil and he'll need a good one."

"*Vetter's in town, Gulley!*" Renzo almost spat the word out. "You know how he is? He ain't a gang you bust up. He's got a nasty habit of killing people. Like always, he's moving in. So we pay you for the stuff and deliver what we lost. We make it look good and you tell Phil it was Vetter. He'll believe that."

I could hear Gulley breathing

hard. "Jerks, you guys," he said. There was a hiss in his words. "I should string it on Vetter. Man, you're plain nuts. I seen that guy operate before. Who the hell you think edged into that Frisco deal? Who got Morgan in El Paso while he was packing a half a million in cash and another half in powder. So a chowderhead hauls him in to cream some local fish and the guy walks away with the town. *Who the hell is that guy?*"

Johnny's laugh was bitter. Sharp. Gulley had said it all and it was like a knife sticking in and being twisted. "I'd like to meet him. Seems like he was a buddy of Jack Cooley. You remember Jack Cooley, Gulley? You were in on that. Cooley got off with your kick too. Maybe Vetter would like to know about that."

"Shut up."

"Not yet. We got business to talk about."

Gulley seemed out of breath. "Business be damned. I ain't tangling with Vetter."

"Scared?"

"Damn right, and so are you. So's everybody else."

"Okay," Johnny said. "So for one guy or a couple he's trouble. In a big town he can make his play and move fast. Thing is with enough guys in a burg like this he can get nailed."

"And how many guys get nailed with him. He's no dope. Who you trying to smoke?"

"Nuts, who cares who gets nailed

as long as it ain't your own bunch. You think Phil Carboy'll go easy if he thinks Vetter jacked a load out from under him? Like you told us, Phil's an up and coming guy. He's growing. He figures on being the top kick around here and let Vetter give him the business and he goes all out to get the guy. So two birds are killed. Vetter and Carboy. Even if Carboy gets him, his load's gone. He's small peanuts again."

"Where does that get me?" Gulley asked.

"I was coming to that. You make yours. The percentage goes up ten. Good?"

Gulley must have been thinking greedy. He started moving again, his feet coming closer. He said, "You talk big. Where's the cabbage?"

"I got it on me," Renzo said.

"You know what Phil was paying for the junk?"

"The word said two million."

"It's gonna cost to take care of the boys on the boat."

"Not so much." Renzo's laugh had no humor in it. "They talk and either Carboy'll finish 'em or Vetter will. They stay shut up for free."

"How much for me?" Gulley asked.

"One hundred thousand for swinging the deal, plus the extra percentage. You think it's worth it?"

"I'll go it," Gulley said.

Nobody spoke for a second, then Gulley said, "I'll phone the boat to pull into the slipside docks. They

can unload there. The stuff is packed in beer cans. It won't make a big package so look around for it. They'll probably shove it under one of the benches."

"Who gets the dough?"

"You row out to the last boat mooring. The thing is red with a white stripe around it. Unscrew the top and drop it in."

"Same as the way we used to work it?"

"Right. The boys on the boat won't like going in the harbor and they'll be plenty careful, so don't stick around to lift the dough and the stuff too. That 'breed on the ship got a lockerfull of chatter guns he likes to hand out to his crew."

"It'll get played straight."

"I'm just telling you."

Renzo said, "What do you tell Phil?"

"You kidding? I don't say nothing. All I know is I lose contact with the boat. Next the word goes that Vetter is mixed up in it. I don't say nothing." He paused for a few seconds, his breath whistling in his throat, then, "But don't forget something . . . You take Carboy for a sucker and maybe even Vetter. Lay off me. I keep myself covered. Anything happens to me and the next day the cops get a letter naming names. Don't ever forget that."

Renzo must have wanted to say something. He didn't. Instead he rasped, "Go get the cash for this guy."

Somebody said, "Sure, boss," and

walked across the room. I heard the lock snick open, then the door.

"This better work," Renzo said. He fiddled with his glass a while. "I'd sure like to know what that punk did with the other stuff."

"He ain't gonna sell it, that's for sure," Johnny told him. "You think maybe Cooley and Vetter were in business together."

"I'm thinking maybe Cooley was in business with a lot of people. That lousy blonde. When I get her she'll talk plenty. I should've kept my damn eyes open."

"I tried to tell you, boss."

"Shut up," Renzo said. "You just see that she gets found."

I didn't wait to hear any more. I got down in the darkness and headed back to the path. Overhead the sky was starting to lighten as the moon came up, a red circle that did funny things to the night and started the long fingers of shadows drifting out from the scraggly brush. The trees seemed to be ponderous things that reached down with sharp claws, feeling around in the breeze for something to grab. I found the place where I had left Helen, found a couple of pebbles and tossed them back into the brush. I heard her gasp, then whispered her name.

She came forward silently, said, "Joe?" in a hushed tone.

"Yeah. *Let's get out of here.*"

"What happened?"

"Later. I'll start back to the cab to make sure it's clear. If you don't hear anything, follow me. Got it?"

". . . yes." She was hesitant and I couldn't blame her. I got off the gravel path into the sand, took it easy and tried to search out the shadows. I reached the clearing, stood there until I was sure the place was empty then hopped over to the cab.

I had to shake the driver awake and he came out of it stupidly. "Look, keep your lights off going back until you're on the highway, then keep 'em on low. There's enough moon to see by."

"Hey . . . I don't want trouble."

"You'll get it unless you do what I tell you."

"Well . . . okay."

"A dame's coming out in a minute. Soon as she comes start it up and try to keep it quiet."

I didn't have long to wait. I heard her feet on the gravel, walking fast but not hurrying. Then I heard something else that froze me a second. A long, low whistle of appreciation like the kind any blonde'll get from the pool hall boys. I hopped in the cab, held the door open. "Let's go, feller," I said.

As soon as the engine ticked over Helen started to run. I yanked her inside as the car started moving and kept down under the windows. She said, "Somebody . . ."

"I heard it."

"I didn't see who it was."

"Maybe it'll pass. Enough cars come out here to park."

Her hand was tight in mine, the nails biting into my palm. She was

half-turned on the seat, her dress pulled back over the glossy knees of her nylons, her breasts pressed against my arm. She stayed that way until we reached the highway then little by little eased up until she was sitting back against the cushions. I tapped my forefinger against my lips then pointed to the driver. Helen nodded, smiled, then squeezed my hand again. This time it was different. The squeeze went with the smile.

I paid off the driver at the edge of town. He got more than the meter said, a lot more. It was big enough to keep a man's mouth shut long enough to get him in trouble when he opened it too late. When he was out of sight we walked until we found another cab, told the driver to get us to a small hotel someplace, and the usual leer and blonde inspection muttered the name of a joint and pulled away from the curb.

It was the kind of a place where they don't ask questions and don't believe what you write in the register anyway. I signed *Mr. and Mrs. Valiscivitch*, paid the bill in advance for a week and when the clerk read the name I got a screwy look because the name was too screwballed to be anything but real to him. Maybe he figured his clientele was changing. When we got to the room I said, "You park here for a few days."

"Are you going to tell me anything?"

"Should I?"

"You're strange, Joe. A very strange boy."

"Stop calling me a boy."

Her face got all beautiful again and when she smiled there was a real grin in it. She stood there with her hands on her hips and her feet apart like she was going into some part of her routine and I could feel my body starting to burn at the sight of her. She could do things with herself by just breathing and she did them, the smile and her eyes getting deeper all the time. She saw what was happening to me and said, "You're not such a boy after all." She held out her hand and I took it, pulling her in close. "The first time you were a boy. All bloody, dirt ground into your face. When Renzo tore you apart I could have killed him. Nobody should do that to another one, especially a boy. But then there was Johnny and you seemed to grow up. I'll never forget what you did to him."

"He would have hurt you."

"You're even older now. Or should I say matured? I think you finished growing up last night, Joe, last night . . . with me. I saw you grow up, and I only hope I haven't hurt you in the process. I never was much good for anybody. That's why I left home, I guess. Everyone I was near seemed to get hurt. Even me."

"You're better than they are, Helen. The breaks were against you, that's all."

"Joe . . . do you know you're

the first one who did anything nice for me without wanting . . . something?"

"Helen . . ."

"No, don't say anything. Just take a good look at me. See everything that I am? It shows. I know it shows. I was a lot of things that weren't nice. I'm the kind men want but who won't introduce to their families. I'm a beautiful piece of dirt, Joe." Her eyes were wet. I wanted to brush away the wetness but she wouldn't let my hands go. "You see what I'm telling you? You're young . . . don't brush up against me too close. You'll get dirty and you'll get hurt."

She tried to hide the sob in her throat but couldn't. It came up anyway and I made her let my hands go and when she did I wrapped them around her and held her tight against me. "Helen," I said. "Helen . . ."

She looked at me, grinned weakly. "We must make a funny pair," she said. "Run for it, Joe. Don't stay around any longer."

When I didn't answer right away her eyes looked at mine. I could see her starting to frown a little bit and the curious bewilderment crept across her face. Her mouth was red and moist, poised as if she were going to ask a question, but had forgotten what it was she wanted to say. I let her look and look and look and when she shook her head in a minute gesture of puzzlement I said, "Helen . . . I've rubbed against you. No dirt came off. Maybe it's

because I'm no better than you think you are."

"Joe . . ."

"It never happened to me before, kid. When it happens I sure pick a good one for it to happen with." I ran my fingers through her hair. It was nice looking at her like that. Not down, not up, but right into her eyes. "I don't have any family to introduce you to, but if I had, I would. Yellow head, don't worry about me getting hurt."

Her eyes were wide now as if she had the answer. She wasn't believing what she saw.

"I love you, Helen. It's not the way a boy would love anybody. It's a peculiar kind of thing I never want to change."

"Joe . . ."

"But it's yours now. You have to decide. Look at me, kid. Then say it."

Those lovely wide eyes grew misty again and the smile came back slowly. It was a warm, radiant smile that told me more than her words. "It can happen to us, can't it? Perhaps it's happened before to somebody else, but it can happen to us, can't it? Joe . . . It seems so . . . I can't describe it. There's something . . ."

"Say it out."

"I love you, Joe. Maybe it's better that I should love a little boy. Twenty . . . twenty-one you said? Oh, please, please don't let it be wrong, please . . ." She pressed herself to me with a deep-throated sob

and clung there. My fingers rubbed her neck, ran across the width of her shoulders then I pushed her away. I was grinning a little bit now.

"In eighty years it won't make much difference," I said. Then what else I had to say her mouth cut off like a burning torch that tried to seek out the answer and when it was over it didn't seem important enough to mention anyway.

I pushed her away gently. "Now, listen, there isn't much time. I want you to stay here. Don't go out at all and if you want anything, have it sent up. When I come back, I'll knock once. Just once. Keep that door locked and stay out of sight. You got that?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Don't worry about me. I won't be long. Just remember to make sure it's me and nobody else." I grinned at her. "You aren't getting away from me any more, blondie. Now it's the two of us for keeps, together."

"All right, Joe."

I nudged her chin with my fist, held her face up and kissed it. That curious look was back and she was trying to think of something again. I grinned, winked at her and got out before she could keep me. I even grinned at the clerk downstairs, but he didn't grin back. He probably thought anybody who'd leave a blonde like that alone was nuts or married and he wasn't used to it.

But it sure felt good. You know how. You feel so good you want to

tear something apart or laugh and maybe a little crazy, but that's all part of it. That's how I was feeling until I remembered the other things and knew what I had to do.

I found a gin mill down the street and changed a buck into a handful of coins. Three of them got my party and I said, "Mr. Carboy?"

"That's right. Who is this?"

"Joe Boyle."

Carboy told somebody to be quiet then, "What do you want, kid?"

I got the pitch as soon as I caught the tone in his voice. "Your boys haven't got me, if that's what you're thinking," I told him.

"Yeah?"

"I didn't take a powder. I was trying to get something done. For once figure somebody else got brains too."

"You weren't supposed to do any thinking, kid."

"Well, if I don't, you lose a boatload of merchandise, friend."

"What?" It was a whisper that barely came through.

"Renzo's ticking you off. He and Gulley are pulling a switch. Your stuff gets delivered to him."

"Knock it off, kid. What do you know?"

"I know the boat's coming into the slipside docks with the load and Renzo will be picking it up. You hold the bag, brother."

"Joe," he said. "You know what happens if you're queering me."

"I know."

"Where'd you pick it up?"

"Let's say I sat in on Renzo's conference with Gulley."

"Okay, boy. I'll stick with it. You better be right. Hold on." He turned away from the phone and shouted muffled orders at someone. There were more muffled shouts in the background then he got back on the line again. "Just one thing more. What about Vetter?"

"Not yet, Mr. Carboy. Not yet."

"You get some of my boys to stick with you. I don't like my plans interfered with. Where are you?"

"In a place called Patty's. A gin mill."

"I know it. Stay there ten minutes. I'll shoot a couple guys down. You got that handkerchief yet?"

"Still in my pocket."

"Good. Keep your eyes open."

He slapped the phone back and left me there. I checked the clock on the wall, went to the bar and had an orange, then when the ten minutes were up, drifted outside. I was half a block away when a car door slapped shut and I heard the steady tread of footsteps across the street.

Now it was set. Now the big blow. The show ought to be good when it happened and I wanted to see it happen. There was a cab stand at the end of the block and I hopped in the one on the end. He nodded when I gave him the address, looked at the bill in my hand and took off. In back of us the lights of another car prowled through the night, but always looking our way.

You smelt the place before you reached it. On one side the darkened store fronts were like sleeping drunks, little ones and big ones in a jumbled mass, but all smelling the same. There was the fish smell and on top that of wood the salt spray had started to rot. The bay stretched out endlessly on the other side, a few boats here and there marked with running lights, the rest just vague silhouettes against the sky. In the distance the moon turned the train trestle into a giant spidery hand. The white sign, SLIP-SIDE, pointed on the dock area and I told the driver to turn up the street and keep right on going. I picked the bill from my fingers, slowed around the turn, then picked it up when I hopped out. In a few seconds the other car came by, made the turn and lost itself further up the street. When it was gone I stepped out of the shadows and crossed over. Maybe thirty seconds later the car came tearing back up the street again and I ducked back into a doorway. Phil Carboy was going to be pretty sore at those boys of his.

I stood still when I reached the corner again and listened. It was too quiet. You could hear the things that scurried around on the dock. The things were even bold enough to cross the street and one was dragging something in its mouth. Another, a curious elongated creature whose fur shone silvery in the street light pounced on it and the

two fought and squealed until the raider had what it went after.

It happens even with rats, I thought. Who learns from who? Do the rats watch the men or the men watch the rats?

Another one of them ran into the gutter. It was going to cross, then stood on its hind legs in an attitude of attention, its face pointing toward the dock. I never saw it move, but it disappeared, then I heard what it had heard, carefully muffled sounds, then a curse not so muffled.

It came too quick to say it had a starting point. First the quick stab of orange and the sharp thunder of the gun, then the others following and the screams of the slugs whining off across the water. They didn't try to be quiet now. There was a startled shout, a hoarse scream and the yell of somebody who was hit.

Somebody put out the street light and the darkness was a blanket that slid in. I could hear them running across the street, then the moon reached down before sliding behind a cloud again and I saw them, a dozen or so closing in on the dock from both sides.

Out on the water an engine barked into life, was gunned and a boat wheeled away down the channel. The car that had been cruising around suddenly dimmed its lights, turned off the street and stopped. I was right there with no place to duck into and feet started running my way. I couldn't go back and there was trouble ahead. The only

other thing was to make a break for it across the street and hope nobody spotted me.

I'd pushed it too far. I was being a dope again. One of them yelled and started behind me at a long angle. I didn't stop at the rail. I went over the side into the water, kicked away from the concrete abutment and hoped I'd come up under the pier. I almost made it. I was a foot away from the piling but it wasn't enough. When I looked back the guy was there at the rail with a gun bucking in his hand and the bullets were walking up the water toward me. He must have still had a half load left and only a foot to go when another shot blasted out over my head and the guy grabbed at his face with a scream and fell back to the street. The guy up above said, "Get the son . . ." and the last word had a whistle to it as something caught him in the belly. He was all doubled up when he hit the water and his tombstone was a tiny trail of bubbles that broke the surface a few seconds before stopping altogether.

I pulled myself further under the dock. From where I was I could hear the voices and now they had quieted down. Out on the street somebody yelled to stand back and before the words were out cut loose with a sharp blast of an automatic rifle. It gave the bunch on the street time to close in and those on the dock scurried back further.

Right over my head the planks

were warped away and when a voice said, "I found it," I could pick Johnny's voice out of the racket.

"Where?"

"Back ten feet on the pole. Better hop to it before they get wise and cut the wires."

Johnny moved fast and I tried to move with him. By the time I reached the next piling I could hear him dialing the phone. He talked fast, but kept his voice down. "*Renzo? Yeah, they bottled us. Somebody pulled the cork out of the deal. Yeah. The hell with that, you call the cops. Let them break it up.* Sure, sure. Move it. We can make it to one of the boats. They got Tommy and Balco. Two of the others were hit but not bad. Yeah, it's Carboy all right. He ain't here himself, but they're his guys. Yeah, I got the stuff. Shake it."

His feet pounded on the planking overhead and I could hear his voice without making out what he said. The next minute the blasting picked up and I knew they were trying for a stand off. Whatever they had for cover up there must have been pretty good because the guys on the street were swearing at it and yelling for somebody to spread out and get them from the sides. The only trouble was that there was no protection on the street and if the moon came out again they'd be nice easy targets.

It was the moan of the siren that stopped it. First one, then another joined in and I heard them running

for the cars. A man screamed and yelled for them to take it easy. Something rattled over my head and when I looked up, a frame of black marred the flooring. Something was rolled to the edge, then crammed over. Another followed it. Men. Dead. They bobbed for a minute, then sank slowly. Somebody said, "Damn, I hate to do that. He was okay."

"Shut up and get out there." It was Johnny.

The voice said, "Yeah, come on, you," then they went over the side. I stayed back of the piling and watched them swim for the boats. The sirens were coming closer now. One had a lead as if it knew the way and the others didn't. Johnny didn't come down. I grinned to myself, reached for a cross-brace and swung up on it. From there it was easy to make the trapdoor.

And there was Johnny by the end of the pier squatting down behind a packing case that seemed to be built around some machinery, squatting with that tenseness of a guy about to run. He had a box in his arms about two feet square and when I said, "Hello, chum," he stood up so fast he dropped it, but he would have had to do that anyway the way he was reaching for his rod.

He almost had it when I belted him across the nose. I got him with another sharp hook and heard the breath hiss out of him. It spun him around until the packing case caught

him and when I was coming in he let me have it with his foot. I skidded sideways, took the toe of his shoe on my hip then had his arm in a lock that brought a scream tearing out of his throat. He was going for the rod again when the arm broke and in a crazy surge of pain he jerked loose, tripped me, and got the gun out with his good hand. I rolled into his feet as it coughed over my head, grabbed his wrist and turned it into his neck and he pulled the trigger for the last time in trying to get his hand loose. There was just one last, brief, horrified expression in his eyes as he looked at me, then they filmed over to start rotting away.

The siren that was screaming turned the corner with its wail dying out. Brakes squealed against the pavement and the car stopped, the red light on its hood snapping shut. The door opened opposite the driver, stayed open as if the one inside was listening. Then a guy crawled out, a little guy with a big gun in his hand. He said, "Johnny?"

Then he ran. Silently, like an Indian, I almost had Johnny's gun back in my hand when he reached me.

"You," Sergeant Gonzales said. He saw the package there, twisted his mouth into a smile and let me see the hole in the end of his gun. I still made one last try for Johnny's gun when the blast went off. I half expected the sickening smash of a bullet, but none came. When I

looked up, Gonzales was still there. Something on the packing crate had hooked into his coat and held him up.

I couldn't see into the shadows where the voice came from. But it was a familiar voice. It said, "You ought to be careful son."

The gun the voice held slithered back into leather.

"Thirty seconds. No more. You might even do the job right and beat it in his car. He was in on it. The cop . . . he was working with Cooley. Then Cooley ran out on him too so he played along with Renzo. Better move, kid."

The other sirens were almost there. I said, "Watch yourself. And thanks."

"Sure, kid. I hate crooked cops worse than crooks."

I ran for the car, hopped in and pulled the door shut. Behind me something splashed and a two foot square package floated on the water a moment, then turned over and sunk out of sight. I left the lights off, turned down the first street I reached and headed across town. At the main drag I pulled up, wiped the wheel and gearshift free of prints and got out.

There was dawn showing in the sky. It would be another hour yet before it was morning. I walked until I reached the junkyard in back of Gordon's office, found the wreck of a car that still had cushions in it, climbed in and went to sleep.

Morning, afternoon, then eve-

ning. I slept through the first two. The last one was harder. I sat there thinking things, keeping out of sight. My clothes were dry now, but the cigarettes still had a lousy taste. There was a twinge in my stomach and my mouth was dry. I gave it another hour before I moved, then went back over the fence and down the street to a dirty little diner that everybody avoided except the boys who rode the rods into town. I knocked off a plate of bacon and eggs, paid for it with some of the change I had left, picked up a pack of butts and started out. That was when I saw the paper on the table.

It made quite a story. GANG WAR FLARES ON WATERFRONT, and under it a subhead that said, *Cop, Hoodlum, Slain in Gun Duel*. It was a masterpiece of writing that said nothing, intimated much and brought out the fact that though the place was bullet-sprayed and though evidence of other wounded was found, there were no bodies to account for what had happened. One sentence mentioned the fact that Johnny was connected with Mark Renzo. The press hinted at police inefficiency. There was the usual statement from Captain Gerot.

The thing stunk. Even the press was afraid to talk out. How long would it take to find out Gonzales didn't die by a shot from Johnny's gun? Not very long. And Johnny . . . a cute little twist like that would usually get a big splash. There wasn't even any curiosity shown

about Johnny. I let out a short laugh and threw the paper back again.

They were like rats, all right. They just went the rats one better. They dragged their bodies away with them so there wouldn't be any ties. Nice. Now find the doctor who patched them up. Find what they were after on the docks. Maybe they figured to heist ten tons or so of machinery. Yeah, try and find it.

No, they wouldn't say anything. Maybe they'd have to hit it a little harder when the big one broke. When the boys came in who paid a few million out for a package that was never delivered. Maybe when the big trouble came and the blood ran again somebody would crawl back out of his hole long enough to put it into print. Or it could be that Bucky Edwards was right. Life was too precious a thing to sell cheaply.

I thought about it, remembering everything he had told me. When I had it all back in my head again I turned toward the place where I knew Bucky would be and walked faster. Halfway there it started to drizzle. I turned up the collar of my coat.

It was a soft rain, one of those things that comes down at the end of summer, making its own music like a dull concert you think will have no end. It drove people indoors until even the cabs didn't bother to cruise. The cars that went by had their windows steamed into opaque squares, the drivers peering

through the hand-wiped panes.

I jumped a streetcar when one came along, took it downtown and got off again. And I was back with the people I knew and the places made for them. Bucky was on his usual stool and I wondered if it was a little too late. He had that all gone look in his face and his fingers were caressing a tall amber-colored glass.

When I sat down next to him his eyes moved, giving me a glassy stare. It was like the cars on the street, they were cloudy with mist, then a hand seemed to reach out and rub them clear. They weren't glass any more. I could see the white in his fingers as they tightened around the glass and he said, "You did it fancy, kiddo. Get out of here."

"Scared, Bucky?"

His eyes went past me to the door, then came back again. "Yes. You said it right. I'm scared. Get out. I don't want to be around when they find you."

"For a guy who's crocked most of the time you seem to know a lot about what happens."

"I think a lot. I figure it out. There's only one answer."

"If you know it why don't you write it?"

"Living's not much fun any more, but what there is of it, I like. Beat it, kid."

This time I grinned at him, a big fat grin and told the bartender to get me an orange. Large. He shoved it down, picked up my dime and went back to his paper.

I said, "Let's hear about it, Bucky." I could feel my mouth changing the grin into something else. "I don't like to be a target either. I want to know the score."

Bucky's tongue made a pass over dry lips. He seemed to look back inside himself to something he had been a long time ago, dredging the memory up. He found himself in the mirror behind the back bar, twisted his mouth at it and looked back at me again.

"This used to be a good town."

"Not that," I said.

He didn't hear me. "Now anybody who knows anything is scared to death. To death, I said. Let them talk and that's what they get. Death. From one side or another. It was bad enough when Renzo took over, worse when Carboy came in. It's not over yet." His shoulders made an involuntary shudder and he pulled the drink halfway down the glass. "Friend Gulley had an accident this afternoon. He was leaving town and was run off the road. He's dead."

I whistled softly. "Who?"

For the first time a trace of humor put lines at the corner of his lips. "It wasn't Renzo. It wasn't Phil Carboy. They were all accounted for. The tire marks are very interesting. It looked like the guy wanted to stop friend Gulley for a chat but Gulley hit the ditch. You could call it a real accident without lying." He finished the rest of the drink, put it down and said, "The boys

are scared stiff." He looked at me closely then. "Vetter," he said.

"He's getting close."

Bucky didn't hear me. "I'm getting to like the guy. He does what should have been done a long time ago. By himself he does it. They know who killed Gonzales. One of Phil's boys saw it happen before he ran for it. There's a guy with a broken neck who was found out on the highway and they know who did that and how." He swirled the ice around in his glass. "He's taking good care of you, kiddo."

I didn't say anything.

"There's just one little catch to it, Joe. One little catch."

"What?"

"That boy who saw Gonzales get it saw something else. He saw you and Johnny tangle over the package. He figures you got it. Everybody knows and now they want you. It can't happen twice. Renzo wants it and Carboy wants it. You know who gets it?"

I shook my head.

"You get it. In the belly or in the head. Even the cops want you that bad. Captain Gerot even thinks that way. You better get out of here, Joe. Keep away from me. There's something about you that spooks me. Something in the way your eyes look. Something about your face. I wish I could see into that mind of yours. I always thought I knew people, but I don't know you at all. You spook me. You should see your own eyes. I've seen eyes like yours

before but I can't remember where. They're familiar as hell, but I can't place them. They don't belong in a kid's face at all. Go on, Joe, beat it. The boys are all over town. They got orders to do just one thing. Find you. When they do I don't want you sitting next to me."

"When do you write the big story, Bucky?"

"You tell me."

My teeth were tight together with the smile moving around them. "It won't be long."

"No . . . maybe just a short obit. They're tracking you fast. That hotel was no cover at all. Do it smarter the next time."

The ice seemed to pour down all over me. It went down over my shoulders, ate through my skin until it was in the blood that pounded through my body. I grabbed his arm and damn near jerked him off the stool. "What about the hotel?"

All he did was shrug. Bucky was gone again.

I cursed silently, ran back into the rain again and down the block to the cab stand.

The clerk said he was sorry, he didn't know anything about room 612. The night man had taken a week off. I grabbed the key from his hand and pounded up the stairs. All I could feel was that mad frenzy of hate swelling in me and I kept saying her name over and over to myself. I threw the door open, stood there breathing fast while I called myself a dozen different kinds of fool.

She wasn't there. It was empty.

A note lay beside the telephone. All it said was, "*Bring it where you brought the first one.*"

I laid the note down again and stared out the window into the night. There was sweat on the backs of my hands. Bucky had called it. They thought I had the package and they were forcing a trade. Then Mark Renzo would kill us both. He thought.

I brought the laugh up from way down in my throat. It didn't sound much like me at all. I looked at my hands and watched them open and close into fists. There were callouses across the palms, huge things that came from Gordon's junk carts. A year and a half of it, I thought. Eighteen months of pushing loads of scrap iron for pennies then all of a sudden I was part of a multi-million dollar operation. The critical part of it. I was the enigma. Mc, Joey the junk pusher. Not even Vetter now. Just me. Vetter would come when they had me out of the way.

For a while I stared at the street. That tiny piece of luck that chased me caught up again and I saw the car stop and the men jump out. One was Phil Carboy's right hand man. In a way it was funny. Renzo was always a step ahead of the challenger, but Phil was coming up fast. He'd caught on too and was ready to pull the same deal. He didn't know it had already been pulled.

But that was all right too.

I reached for the pen on the desk,

lifted a sheet of cheap stationary out of the drawer and scrawled across it, "*Joe . . . be back in a few hours. Stay here with the package until I return. I'll have the car ready.*" I signed it, *Helen*, put it by the phone and picked up the receiver.

The clerk said, "Yes?"

I said, "In a minute some men will come in looking for the blonde and me. You think the room is empty, but let them come up. You haven't seen me at all yet. Understand?"

"Say . . ."

"Mister, if you want to walk out of here tonight you'll do what you're told. You're liable to get killed otherwise. Understand that?"

I hung up and let him think about it. I'd seen his type before and I wasn't worried a bit. I got out, locked the door and started up the stairs to the roof. It didn't take me longer than five minutes to reach the street and when I turned the corner the light was back on in the room I had just left. I gave it another five minutes and the tall guy came out again, spoke to the driver of the car and the fellow reached in and shut off the engine. It had worked. The light in the window went out. The vigil had started and the boys could afford to be pretty patient. They thought.

The rain was a steady thing coming down just a little bit harder than it had. It was cool and fresh with the slightest nip in it. I walked, putting the pieces together in my head. I

did it slowly, replacing the fury that had been there, deliberately wiping out the gnawing worry that tried to grow. I reached the deserted square of the park and picked out a bench under a tree and sat there letting the rain drip down around me. When I looked at my hands they were shaking.

I was thinking wrong. I should have been thinking about fat, ugly faces; rat faces with deep voices and whining faces. I should have been thinking about the splashes of orange a rod makes when it cuts a man down and blood on the street. Cops who want the big pay off. Thinking of a town where even the press was cut off and the big boys came from the city to pick up the stuff that started more people on the long slide down to the grave.

Those were the things I should have thought of.

All I could think of was Helen. Lovely Helen who had been all things to many men and hated it. Beautiful Helen who didn't want me to be hurt, who was afraid the dirt would rub off. Helen who found love for the first time . . . and me. The beauty in her face when I told her. Beauty that waited to be kicked and wasn't because I loved her too much and didn't give a damn what she had been. She was different now. Maybe I was too. She didn't know it, but she was the good one, not me. She was the child that needed taking care of, not me. Now she was hours away from being dead and so was I.

The thing they wanted, the thing that could buy her life I saw floating in the water beside the dock. It was like having a yacht with no fuel aboard.

The police? No, not them. They'd want me. They'd think it was a phoney. That wasn't the answer. Not Phil Carboy either. He was after the same thing Renzo was.

I started to laugh, it was so damn, pathetically funny. I had it all in my hand and couldn't turn it around. What the devil does a guy have to do? How many times does he have to kill himself? The answer. It was right there but wouldn't come through. It wasn't the same answer I had started with, but a better one.

So I said it all out to myself. Out loud, with words. I started with the night I brought the note to Renzo, the one that promised him Vetter would cut his guts out. I even described their faces to myself when Vetter's name was mentioned. One name, that's all it took, and you could see the fear creep in because Vetter was deadly and unknown. He was the shadow that stood there, the one they couldn't trust, the one they all knew in the society that stayed outside the law. He was a high-priced killer who never missed and always got more than he was paid to take. So deadly they'd give anything to keep him out of town, even to doing the job he was there for. So deadly they could throw me or anybody else to the wolves just to finger him. So damn deadly they

put an army on him, yet so deadlly he could move behind their lines without any trouble at all.

Vetter.

I cursed the name. I said Helen's. Vetter wasn't important any more. Not to me.

The rain lashed at my face as I looked up into it. The things I knew fell into place and I knew what the answer was. I remembered something I didn't know was there, a sign on the docks by the fishing fleet that said "SEASON LOCKERS."

Jack Cooley had been smart by playing it simple. He even left me the ransom.

I got up, walked to the corner and waited until a cab came by. I flagged him down, got in and gave the address of the white house where Cooley had lived.

The same guy answered the door. He took the bill from my hand and nodded me in. I said, "Did he leave any old clothes behind at all?"

"Some fishing stuff downstairs. It's behind the coal bin. You want that?"

"I want that," I said.

He got up and I followed him. He switched on the cellar light, took me downstairs and across the littered pile of refuse a cellar can collect. When he pointed to the old set of dungarees on the nail in the wall, I went over and felt through the pockets. The key was in the jacket. I said thanks and went back upstairs. The taxi was still waiting. He flipped his butt away when I got in,

threw the heap into gear and headed toward the smell of the water.

I had to climb the fence to get on the pier. There wasn't much to it. The lockers were tall steel affairs, each with somebody's name scrawled across it in chalk. The number that matched the key didn't say Cooley, but it didn't matter any more either. I opened it up and saw the cardboard box that had been jammed in there so hard it had snapped one of the rods in the corner. Just to be sure I pulled one end open, tore through the other box inside and tasted the white powder it held.

Heroin.

They never expected Cooley to do it so simply. He had found a way to grab their load and stashed it without any trouble at all. Friend Jack was good at that sort of thing. Real clever. Walked away with a couple million bucks' worth of stuff and never lived to convert it. He wasn't quite smart enough. Not quite as smart as Carboy, Gerot, Renzo . . . or even a kid who pushed a junk cart. Smart enough to grab the load, but not smart enough to keep on living.

I closed the locker and went back over the fence with the box in my arms. The cabbie found me a phone in a gin mill and waited while I made my calls. The first one got me Gerot's home number. The second got me Captain Gerot himself, a very annoyed Gerot who had been pulled out of bed.

I said, "Captain, this is Joe Boyle

and if you trace this call you're going to scramble the whole deal."

So the captain played it smart. "Go ahead," was all he told me.

"You can have them all. Every one on a platter. You know what I'm talking about?"

"I know."

"You want it that way?"

"I want you, Joe. Just you."

"I'll give you that chance. First you have to take the rest. There won't be any doubt this time. They won't be big enough to crawl out of it. There isn't enough money to buy them out either. You'll have every one of them cold."

"I'll still want you."

I laughed at him. "I said you'll get your chance. All you have to do is play it my way. You don't mind that, do you?"

"Not if I get you, Joe."

I laughed again. "You'll need a dozen men. Ones you can trust. Ones who can shoot straight and aren't afraid of what might come later."

"I can get them."

"Have them stand by. It won't be long. I'll call again."

I hung up, stared at the phone a second, then went back outside. The cabbie was working his way through another cigarette. I said, "I need a fast car. Where do I get one?"

"How fast for how much?"

"The limit."

"I got a friend with a souped-up Ford. Nothing can touch it. It'll cost you."

I showed him the thing in my hand. His eyes narrowed at the edges. "Maybe it won't cost you at that," he said. He looked at me the same way Helen had, then waved me in.

We made a stop at an out of the way rooming house. I kicked my clothes off and climbed into some fresh stuff, then tossed everything else into a bag and woke up the landlady of the place. I told her to mail it to the post office address on the label and gave her a few bucks for her trouble. She promised me she would, took the bag into her room and I went outside. I felt better in the suit. I patted it down to make sure everything was set. The cabbie shot me a half smile when he saw me and held the door open.

I got the Ford and it didn't cost me a thing unless I piled it up. The guy grinned when he handed me the keys and made a familiar gesture with his hand. I grinned back. I gave the cabbie his fare with a little extra and got in the Ford with my box. It was almost over.

A mile outside Mark Renzo's roadhouse I stopped at a gas station and while the attendant filled me up all around, I used his phone. I got Renzo on the first try and said, "This is Joe, fat boy."

His breath in the phone came louder than the words. "Where are you?"

"Never mind. I'll be there. Let me talk to Helen."

I heard him call and then there

was Helen. Her voice was tired and all the hope was gone from it. She said, "Joe . . ."

It was enough. I'd know her voice any time. I said, "Honey . . . don't worry about it. You'll be okay."

She started to say something else, but Renzo must have grabbed the phone from her. "You got the stuff, kid?"

"I got it."

"Let's go, sonny. You know what happens if you don't."

"I know," I said. "You better do something first. I want to see the place of yours empty in a hurry. I don't feel like being stopped going in. Tell them to drive out and keep on going. I'll deliver the stuff to you, that's all."

"Sure, kid, sure. You'll see the boys leave."

"I'll be watching," I said.

Joke.

I made the other call then. It went back to my hotel room and I did it smart. I heard the phone ring when the clerk hit the room number, heard the phone get picked up and said as though I were in one big hurry, "*Look, Helen, I'm hopping the stuff out to Renzo's. He's waiting for it. As soon as he pays off we'll blow. See you later.*"

When I slapped the phone back I laughed again then got Gerot again. This time he was waiting. I said, "Captain . . . they'll all be at Renzo's place. There'll be plenty of fun for everybody. You'll even find a fortune in heroin."

"You're the one I want, Joe."

"Not even Vetter?"

"No, he comes next. First you."

This time he hung up on me. So I laughed again as the joke got funnier and made my last call.

The next voice was the one I had come to know so well. I said, "Joe Boyle. I'm heading for Renzo's. Cooley had cached the stuff in a locker and I need it for a trade. I have a light blue Ford and need a quick way out. The trouble is going to start."

"There's a side entrance," the voice said. "They don't use it any more. If you're careful you can come in that way and if you stay careful you can make it to the big town without getting spotted."

"I heard about Gulley," I said.

"Saddening. He was a wealthy man."

"You'll be here?"

"Give me five minutes," the voice told me. "I'll be at the side entrance. I'll make sure nobody stops you."

"There'll be police. They won't be asking questions."

"Let me take care of that."

"Everybody wants Vetter," I said.

"Naturally. Do you think they'll find him?"

I grinned. "I doubt it."

The other voice chuckled as it hung up.

I saw them come out from where I stood in the bushes. They got into cars, eight of them and drove down the drive slowly. They turned back

toward town and I waited until their lights were a mile away before I went up the steps of the club.

At that hour it was an eerie place, a dimly lit ghost house showing the signs of people that had been there earlier. I stood inside the door, stopped and listened. Up the stairs I heard a cough. It was like that first night, only this time I didn't have somebody dragging me. I could remember the stairs and the long, narrow corridor at the top, and the oak panelled door at the end of it. Even the thin line of light that came from under the door. I snuggled the box under my arm and walked in.

Renzo was smiling from his chair behind the desk. It was a funny kind of a smile like I was a sucker. Helen was huddled on the floor in a corner holding a hand to the side of her cheek. Her dress had been shredded down to the waist, and tendrils of tattered cloth clung to the high swell of her breasts, followed the smooth flow of her body. Her other hand tried desperately to hide her nakedness from Renzo's leer. She was trembling, and the terror in her eyes was an ugly thing.

And Renzo grinned. Big, fat Renzo. Renzo the louse whose eyes were now on the package under my arm, with the grin turning to a slow sneer. Renzo the killer who found a lot of ways to get away with murder and was looking at me as if he were seeing me for the first time.

He said, "You got your going away clothes on, kid."

"Yeah."

"You won't be needing them." He made the sneer bigger, but I wasn't watching him. I was watching Helen, seeing the incredible thing that crossed her face.

"I'm different, Helen?"

She couldn't speak. All she could do was nod.

"I told you I wasn't such a kid. I just look that way. Twenty . . . twenty-one you thought?" I laughed and it had a funny sound. Renzo stopped sneering. "I got ten years on that, honey. Don't worry about being in love with a kid."

Renzo started to get up then. Slowly, a ponderous monster with hands spread apart to kill something. "You two did it. You damn near ruined me. You know what happens now?" He licked his lips and the muscles rolled under his shirt.

My face was changing shape and I nodded. Renzo never noticed. Helen saw it. I said, "A lot happens now, fat boy." I dropped the package on the floor and kicked it to one side. Renzo moved out from behind the desk. He wasn't thinking any more. He was just seeing me and thinking of his empire that had almost toppled. The package could set it up again. I said, "Listen, you can hear it happen."

Then he stopped to think. He turned his head and you could hear the whine of engines and the shots coming clear across the night through the rain. There was a frenzy about the way it was happening, the frenzy

and madness that goes into a *banzai* charge and above it the moan of sirens that seemed to go ignored.

It was happening to Renzo too, the kill hate in his eyes, the saliva that made wet paths from the corners of his tight mouth. His whole body heaved and when his head turned back to me again, the eyes were bright with the lust of murder.

I said, "Come here, Helen," and she came to me. I took the envelope out of my pocket and gave it to her, and then I took off my jacket, slipping it over her shoulders. She pulled it closed over her breasts, the terror in her eyes fading. "Go out the side . . . the old road. The car is waiting there. You'll see a tall guy beside it, a big guy all around and if you happen to see his face, forget it. Tell him this. Tell him I said to give the report to the Chief. Tell him to wait until I contact him for the next assignment then start the car and wait for me. I'll be in a hurry. You got that?"

"Yes, Joe." The disbelief was still in her eyes.

Renzo moved slowly, the purpose plain in his face. His hands were out and he circled between me and the door. There was something fiendish about his face.

The sirens and the shooting were getting closer.

He said, "Vetter won't get you out of this, kid. I'm going to kill you and it'll be the best thing I ever did. Then the dame. The blonde. Weber told me he saw a blonde at

Gulley's and I knew who did this to me. The both of you are going to die, kid. There ain't no Vetter here now."

I let him have a long look at me. I grinned. I said, "Remember what that note said? It said Vetter was going to spill your guts all over the floor. You remember that, Renzo?"

"Yeah," He said. "Now tell me you got a gun, kid. Tell me that and I'll tell you you're a liar. I can smell a rod a mile away. You had it, kid. There ain't no Vetter here now."

Maybe it was the way I let myself go. I could feel the loosening in my shoulders and my face was a picture only Renzo could see. "You killed too many men, Renzo, one too many. The ones you peddle the dope to die slowly, the ones who take it away die quick. It's still a lot of men. You killed them, Renzo, a whole lot of them. You know what happens to killers in this country? It's a funny law, but it works. Sometimes to get what it wants, it works in peculiar fashion. But it works.

"Remember the note. Remember hard what it said." I grinned and what was in it stopped him five feet away. What was in it made him frown, then his eyes opened wide, almost too wide and he had the expression Helen had the first time.

I said to her, "Don't wait, Helen," and heard the door open and close. Renzo was backing away, his feet shuffling on the carpet.

Two minutes at the most.

"I'm Vetter," I said. "Didn't you

know? Couldn't you tell? Me . . . Vetter. The one everybody wonders about, even the cops. Vetter the puzzle. Vetter the one who's there but isn't there." The air was cold against my teeth. "Remember the note, Renzo. No, you can't smell a gun because I haven't got one. But look at my hand. You're big and strong . . . you're a killer, but look at my hand and find out who the specialist really is and you'll know that there was no lie in that note you read the first night."

Renzo tried to scream, stumbled and fell. I laughed again and moved

in on him. He was reaching for something in the desk drawer knowing all the time that he wasn't going to make it and the knife in my hand made a nasty little snick and he screamed again so high it almost blended with the sirens.

Maybe one minute left, but it would be enough and the puzzle would always be there and the name when mentioned would start another ball rolling and the country a little cleaner and the report when the Chief read it would mean one more done with . . . done differently, but done.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

In this issue, MICKEY SPILLANE concludes his four-part serial, *Everybody's Watching Me*, and a well-worth-waiting-for windup it is. At

the same time, Spillane's book sales continue to skyrocket, with *Time* reporting close to six and a half million copies of his books sold in 1952. His latest thriller, *Kiss Me Deadly*, has held a spot on the best-seller list for the past month, and Spillane's

agent has concluded a \$250,000 movie deal which will bring Mike Hammer to the screen in the near future. Crime pays, it would seem.



DAVID GOODIS hit the big time with his novel, "*Dark Passage*" which was made into a movie starring the Bogart-Bacall team. Goodis wrote his first novel when he was twenty-one and prophetically called it, "*The Ignited*" . . . later threw it into the furnace. Since then he's written hundreds of stories, wrote for radio in New York and is now working in Hollywood. Outstanding novels include *Dark Passage*, *Nightfall* and *Behold This Woman*. Philosophy? . . . Goodis: ". . . work hard . . . but don't ever worry about a thing."



ROBERT PATRICK WILMOT (*The G-Notes*) was born in Butte, Montana and ran away at sixteen to Mexico. He took a fling at Hollywood and did stints in Minneapolis and Chicago as a reporter. For some years he was the reluctant proprietor of a traveling carnival which he inherited from his father. When the depression and hostile sheriffs put the carnival out of business, he became a publicity man and eventually editor of a large newspaper in the Pacific Northwest. With the publication of his first novel, *Blood In Your Eye*, Wilmot emerged as a really major writer in the mystery genre.

RICHARD DEMING has been everything from a door-to-door gold buyer (a lucrative racket during the depression, he says) to executive director of a Red Cross Chapter. His two longest jobs have been with the Army and the American Red Cross, after which he jumped into full-time writing. He is usually preoccupied with Manville Moon, the private eye featured in *The Gallows In My Garden* and the forthcoming *Tweak The Devil's Nose*. But *Mugger Murder* is a completely different type of story, and exhibits Deming's versatility. It also provides some damn fine reading for us all.

RICHARD ELLINGTON is conspicuously noted for his success in three very different fields of crime writing. As a novelist (*Shoot The Works, It's A Crime, Stone Cold Dead, Exit For A Dame*), he is the creator of Steve Drake who romps through *Fan Club*. Also a radio script writer, he has done some of the most popular shows for *Top Guy* and *The Fat Man*. And as a television writer, he has

been a steady contributor to *Man Against Crime* and other high calibre programs. Lives in St. John, Virgin Islands on a piece of land called Gallow's Point. It seems rather appropriate.



Esquire's editorial devoted to HENRY KANE, tabbed him as: "author, bon vivant, stoic, student, tramp, lawyer, philosopher . . . the lad who works off a hangover conceived in a Hoboken dive by swooshing down large orders of Eggs Benedict at the Waldorf on the morning after. . . the man who can use polysyllables on Third Avenue and certain ancient monosyllables on Park Avenue."

If you've read Kane's *Halo For Nobody*, *Hang By The Neck*, or *Until You Are Dead*, you'll certainly enjoy the latest exploits of Peter Chambers. If you haven't, enjoy the story anyway.



SHOWDOWN

"I'm Vetter! Me . . . Vetter. The one everyone wonders about, even the cops. Vetter the puzzle. Vetter the one who's there but isn't there. Remember the note, Renzo. You're big and strong . . . you're a killer!" Renzo tried to scream, stumbled and fell. He was reaching for something in the desk drawer knowing all the time he wasn't going to make it . . . Here's Vetter in the final payoff installment of Mickey Spillane's *Everybody's Watching Me*. Twenty-five thrill-packed pages that wind up the serial and set the pace for this big, big April issue.

SLAUGHTER

Robert Patrick Wilmot is here with a powerful yarn titled *The G-Notes*, an ironic, fast-paced story of money and murder. And there's a Richard Ellington yarn titled *Fan Club*, featuring his well-known private eye, Steve Drake, up to his ears in a Carribean crime crusade.

SUSPENSE

For pure adventure, strongly seasoned with homicide, David Goodis' *The Blue Sweetheart* mixes sapphires, blondes, and revenge with a Ceylon background. And Robert Turner is represented with an edge-of-the-seat tale titled *Be My Guest*, about a punch-drunk boxer and a sex-starved killer.

SHOCK

Don't miss *Mugger Murder* by Richard Deming and *Kid Kill* by Evan Hunter, both of which are the most unusual stories *Manhunt* has ever run. And the comments on each will make you sit up and start thinking hard.

SPICE

And for devil-may-care fun, and high-spirited detection, there's *One Little Bullet* by Henry Kane, a hell-raising fiction feast featuring Peter Chambers, the Manhattan private richard with a flair for trouble. There's more too — and it all adds up to a pleasure-loaded issue for April!